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An Oath in Heaven.

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AN OATH IN HEAVEN

AN EARLY VICTORIAN ROMANCE

BT

JOHN RYCE

AUTHOR OF "THE RECTOR OF AMESTY," &c.

"I have an oath in heaven."
—SHYLOOK.

JAMES CLARKE & CO., 13 & 14, FLEET ST., LONDON, E.C.

1903.

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An Oath in Heaven.

AN EARLY VICTORIAN ROMANCE.

BOOK 1.

CHAPTER I.

"A weaver sat at his loom,
Flinging his shuttle fast,
And a thread that should wear till the hour of doom
Was added at every cast."

1837.

It was early morning in early November, and the chimes of St. Mary's, Hurstwick, ringing out the hour of three fell gratefully upon the ear of Boles, head gamekeeper to Dame Vernon, as he stood ankle-deep in the rotting leaves of Feringham Wood. For him and his subordinate this was the very witching hour, demanding their utmost vigilance. "If nothing happened" between three and five a.m., the keepers might reckon upon getting comfortably to bed a little after seven. But then one never knew; and Boles could tell of desperate encounters fought out to the bitter end in the broad daylight of a wintry morn. These late affairs annoyed him, and his cruel strength degenerated into sheer savageness whenever curtail-

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ment threatened his hours of slumber. The patent for his local sobriquet—"B.B.B." (Brutal Brimstone Boles)—was unmistakeably engrossed upon his countenance, and endorsed whenever he opened his lips, from which curses tumbled with as much noise and naturalness as water in flood on the removal of a Local poachers indeed, avoided Feringham Wood, deterred from making raids thereon as much by the proverbial ferocity of Boles, as by the extraordinary precautions taken by Dame Vernon to prevent ingress or egress. She was no "sportswoman," yet was the first of the local landed proprietors to take advantage of the new law permitting the employment of a second keeper. She bred her game solely for the market, and as she would neither "let" the shooting nor permit sportsmen upon her land, was regarded with contempt and dislike by her neighbours, who never acknowledged her existence by look or salutation. For this ostracism she cared not a jot, but derived an immense amount of satisfaction from the fact that she was, at this date, the sole possessor in the county of the beautiful ring-necked pheasant. And very jealously these birds were guarded, so jealously, indeed, that two young fellows in search of adventure had plotted to assault the stronghold and carry off one of the cherished fowls. The affair originated in a wager, Tom Ronaldson, the Hurstwick banker's son, betting his friend, "Lord Jim" (otherwise known as Lord James Bagshot Warner), third son of the Marquis of Pierhampton, that he dared not attempt so risky a performance. Jim at once took the bet, Tom deciding to be present to see fair play, which he said was the better half of the fun.

They were aware that Boles' subordinate, Blake

had been dismissed from his post ten days ago, they knew also that two days back the keeper had not succeeded in finding a substitute. What time, therefore, could be better than the present, for the premeditated attack? They counted upon their excellent disguise for concealing their identity, and besides assuming wigs and garments foreign to their habit, had arranged to speak, should speech be obligatory, in the broadest dialect of the county.

The point of the joke with these young men, and one which hugely delighted them, was that they, in proprid persona, had feed Boles two days previously to show them the ring-necked pheasants. They then saw for the first time, and with something like dismay, the one long, narrow, devious trail which was evidently the only route from the pheasants' huts to the single gate leading to the high road. It would prove "a bigger job" than they had expected, but the greater the difficulty, the greater the glory.

The moon rode high in a sky almost cloudless; its stately, dreamy passage above the wood marked by the ghostly multiplication upon its floor of the weird, denuded trees. Here and there among the fallen leaves man-traps were hidden, the boards that once gave warning of their presence hanging defaced and unreadable from the bare timber above, the unmelodious playthings of all the winds of heaven, but the special joy of Boles. That individual found cause for rejoicing at this moment in the brightness of the night, but the wind was rising, and that bank of clouds to the north might be driven across the moon's face in no time. This possibility was the supreme hope of the amateur poachers, who, deter-



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mined that Boles solus should prove no match for the two of them, intended to be outside the wood with the coveted bird before he became aware of their proximity. Once out of the wood they were safe, for, as the law then stood, a poacher could only be captured if found in the preserve.

As the last notes of St. Mary's chimes fell on the silent air Boles detected an approaching footstep, and was at once on the alert. As it advanced he recognised it to be that of his new assistant Randall, a fellow of nineteen, whose countenance formed a striking contrast to that of his principal. Randall lived with his parents at the South Lodge of Pierton Abbey, and it was in direct opposition to their wishes that he engaged himself to Boles. But the young man was in love, and imagined that by working night and day for a time he might hasten the advent of his far-off wedding-day. Boles had ordered him to watch the north side of the wood where the ring-necked birds were located; but he was not surprised to see the young man approaching—he might have something to report. When, however, no report was forthcoming, the elder man, always suspicious of his subordinates, said sharply under his breath, "You haven't been sleepin', you dog! It'll prove a bad night's rest for you if you have!"

"No, no, Boles—not sleeping, no, no; but I'm, quite ready for Bedfordshire," replied the young fellow in his natural voice.

"Curse you! You're talking as if it were broad daylight instead o' three o'clock in the mornin'. Those cursed ways 'll never make a keeper of you."

"I wish it was six, that's what I wish," rejoined

Randall, as he examined his gun. "I thought the walk might rouse me, but I'll get back now."

And he smothered a yawn.

"Ay, get back, you idle, good-for-nothin' hound, an' don't let me find any o' they ringers missin', or 't wull be wuss for you afore nightfall. Hist! What's that! There's someun up at they ringers, I'm certain, an' you, you villin, come off a-purpose to leave 'em to it! Curse you! You shall pay for your villiny, as sure's my name's Ben Boles an' Queen Vict'ry's on the throne!"

"Tis nothing but a twig snapping, Boles," returned the younger man, now wide awake; "but I'll run on, and if 'tis any poacher-body I'll whistle for you."

"Ah, you'd go forrard, an' tell yer friens' Boles is comin', so as they may get clear off wi' their ill-gotten gains," snarled the other. "You'll just stay wi' me, though, d'ye hear?"

"All's quiet now, you see," said Randall, upon whom the sharp speech of Boles made little impression.

"Curse you! Hold yer tongue! There 't is agen. Tis one o' they cursed air-guns—I know 'em." And the speaker broke into a run.

During the foregoing fitful talk the two were hurrying along one of the narrow glades leading to the north side of the wood, and the second report evidently proceeded from their near vicinity. Boles immediately stopped, and, seizing his companion, who was for pressing forward, compelled him to stand behind a broad tree trunk, where the two waited in breathless silence for some minutes.

The elder man was well aware that no one could scale the high, impenetrable hedge surrounding the wood, and that no one could leave it from the north without passing the line of vision commanded by his

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present standpoint, so he waited like a dog with ears raised and the calmness of suppressed excitement.

Within forty yards, but hidden by the undergrowth, lay one of the cherished pheasants, its pretty white, and now crimson-stained, necklace standing out clearly from the dark plumage it encircled. Though the bird was dead its destroyer had not yet claimed his unlawful prey. Jim, the shooter, and his friend, Tom, were hidden, like the keepers, behind a tree-trunk, for they had heard approaching footsteps and muffled voices, doubtless called into action by the faint report of the nobleman's gun.

"Hang it, Jim, you ought not to have had a second shot, you know," said Ronaldson, beneath his breath. "B.B.B.'s getting up steam, and, by all the powers, he's got a helper, too! We shall have the dickens to pay before we get out of this!"

Ronaldson was not anxious about his bet: what was money compared to fun like this? But his nature was the more cautious, and all at once, struck by a newly-suggested danger, he whispered, as he laid a detaining hand on his friend's arm, "Give me the gun, Jim; no more firing on any consideration. Give me the gun, I say."

"Shut up, and be hanged to you!" returned the other, as he looked with something like affection upon the weapon he carried, and which, to an inexperienced eye appeared to be nothing more formidable than an ordinary walking-stick.

Jim was fair, his bearing aristocratic, his figure and stature, now masked by ill-fitting garments, faultless; his nose, distorted by red and black paint, strictly classical; his mouth, beneath that false stubble, firm almost to obstinacy. Ronaldson was

dark-skinned, with colour in the cheeks; his hair, under that chestnut wig, jet-black and wavy; his eyes black and shining, his whole expression winning.

"Leave the wretched fowl then, and come on. We've not a moment to lose."

"Get!" was the sole but significant response.

Boles had just arrived at the conclusion that Randall had been right in accrediting the noise they had heard to the snapping of a bough, when his sharp ears detected a running movement, instantaneously followed by the sight of a pair of legs in the act of flight. Rushing from his hiding-place, followed by Randall, he cried in stentorian tones:

"Hold, there! Stan' i' the Queen's name!"

But the legs flew faster and faster.

Boles, who had known the ins and outs of the wood from boyhood, did not waste time in pursuing the fugitives along the winding trail, but struck back among the trees, and presently came up within three yards of the retreating figures, for he now saw there were two men, one well in advance of the other. But the run had rendered him breathless, and, as he paused, he raised his gun, shouting:

"Stan'! or in God's name you're dead men!"

Click went the gun, but it missed fire, and as the fugitives sped on, the hindmost turned for a moment to dangle the bird within the enraged gamekeeper's sight, and, with a yell of triumph, rushed towards the gate not more than twenty yards distant.

The moon was now completely hidden.

Boles, with muttered imprecations, turned again to avail himself of a short cut by means of which he knew he could prevent one, if not both, of the thieves making good his escape. The path now made a rapid descent, which was continued right under the little gate as far as the high road, from whence it lay quite a dozen yards.

Ronaldson had already scaled the pointed wooden palings of the small high barrier to freedom, and, finding all quiet in the road, turned to encourage his friend to greater effort.

Randall had not followed Boles, but appeared to be running after the fugitives along the winding path. When close upon the heels of Jim (who half turned to look over his shoulder) he called out in hoarse, breathless tones:

"Fly, Lord James, fly! He'll kill somebody to-night for sure!"

"So, so," returned Jim, who was fast losing his wind. "That's Randall, is it? Good Randall."

"For God's sake fly! or there'll be murder!" cried the young keeper in agonised tones which he dared not raise.

But there was the gate. The foolish escapade was all but concluded, and no harm done.

Ronaldson waited in breathless suspense as Jim paused for an infinitesimal space to gather strength for the leap.

But just then, at the very moment when he was within two yards of safety Boles appeared, and had not Jim instantly retreated that heavy upraised fist would have given him his quietus. Ronaldson having once cleared the gate, found it impossible without assistance to get back into the wood, owing to the great drop in the path. He could not even attack Boles in the rear, for the top of his billycock alone appeared above the barrier. With a savage back-handed blow the keeper knocked that off, but he was not to be

decoyed by Jim's endeavour to lure him from his post of vantage. This manœuvre, indeed, served only to excite his wrath against Randall.

"Hi! Randall, you villin!" he cried, "if you don't bring the cursed rogue here in two minutes, I'll break every bone in yer body!"

The young keeper at once disappeared, apparently determined to seize the miscreant, but when close upon him he whispered, "Get round to the left."counsel Jim endeavoured as stealthily as possible to carry out. But his blood fired, not only by opposition and excitement, but by the probabilities of discovery and detention, he determined to shoot the brute and clear the gate over his prone body. Boles, too, was prepared to shoot; he would stand no more of this cursed nonsense; and, detecting Jim's advance upon his left, he turned and raised his gun in that direction. The tension was terrible; even the moon peered out from the veiling clouds, to see this duel at such exceptionally close quarters, while Ronaldson (who had recovered and replaced his hat and wig) hung on by his hands to the pointed palings, a cold sweat enwrapping him. "Click!" "Snap!" Both men had fired, but as Boles touched the trigger, Randall rushed forward, and, striking the keeper's gun upwards, himself received the contents of Jim's, and fell helplessly upon his senior. While Boles was pinned to the ground, not alone by the dead weight of the younger man, but by the force with which his head struck the gate behind him, the two young fellows, whose attempt to make fun had turned out so disastrously, fled, with scared faces, beating hearts and clamant consciences along the highway to Hurstwick.

CHAPTER II.

We have no friend but Resolution.—Antony and Gleopatra;

At length Ronaldson, as they neared the Abbey, managed to jerk out the words, "Go—to your—father, Jim. Tell—him. He'll help—you."

And that advice but emphasized the desperate nature of the position. For though the Marquis was not a severe father, one who visited the slightest deviation on the part of his sons from the strict line of right with unflinching rigour, he had ever since Jim's ninth birthday, the day on which his wife, the beautiful young Marchioness met sudden death, cut himself adrift alike from acquaintances, friends, and relatives.

Yet surely, in this terrible emergency, he would devise a way of escape for Jim, if only to preserve the ancient and time-honoured name of Warner from disgrace. There had been some talk of the young lord taking a trip to America or the Continent, and if he left the town at this juncture his departure would excite neither suspicion nor comment. But the Marquis must supply the necessary funds.

So to the east wing of the Abbey, whither the Marquis had removed and located himself since the death of his adorable wife, and where, surrounded by everything that could remind him of his loss, he forbade anyone to visit him unannounced, or occupy rooms in that quarter, sped Jim. A father, like

"the brother" of the Proverbs, is surely "born for adversity" was his unspoken thought. Indeed, to whom else could he go? The gallows-tree within the past half-hour had sprung up to bar his path; his only escape therefrom, as he dumbly reasoned, by means his father would devise.

It never for a moment occurred to the young fellow that the Marquis might, or could, regard this matter of life and death from quite another point of view; that he even might refuse to lend a helping hand in this dire strait. To tell him everything—yes, that was the only way. But Jim was ignorant of the fact that only the previous day strong complaints had been carried to the nobleman of the disgraceful behaviour of his two elder sons, who, having been "rusticated" during their first and last Oxford term, were now rejoicing in freedom from all restraints.

With rapid, yet cautious tread, Jim traversed the corridors, and, finding his father's sitting-room door unlocked, entered without knocking, and scarcely noticed the look of alarmed displeasure with which the Marquis, who had not retired to bed, regarded this unexpected intrusion.

For Jim, filled with an overpowering sense of the awfulness of the late catastrophe, was oblivious of the fact that his costume of country yokel must disguise his identity, was entirely unconscious that the head of the ring-necked pheasant (trifling cause of dire calamity!) was dangling from the pocket of his jacket.

The Marquis had risen, as if to repel the intruder, but re-seated himself as he recognised the voice of his youngest son, his look of angry displeasure gradually changing to one of unmitigated sternness and contempt.

What a hideous story! Contemptible in every par-

ticular! How despicable the whole business, which, from first to last, without faltering or palliation, Jim unfolded in all its ghastly details, save only the part Ronaldson had borne in it.

"What must—what can I do, sir?"

That was the heart cry of this young creature brought face to face so suddenly, so cruelly, yet withal so naturally, so deservedly with the huge terror of impending doom. Doomed he believed himself to a shameful death unless a way of escape were at once opened up. Doomed at an age when life is so beautiful, so desirable, such a land of sweet promises!

And what could be the matter with the Marquis? Was he deaf to this woeful story? Was he blind to the approaching horror? Why was he so cold, so indifferent?

Jim paused expectantly, refusing to listen to the inward voice, which began to whisper his appeal for help had been made in vain.

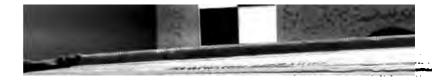
"Do?" echoed the Marquis. "Begone!"

"How ?—where?" faltered the culprit, too dazed to be sensible of the feeble nature of his questionings.

"How you like and where you like. The world, fortunately, is wide—put as much of it between us as you can, and never cross my path again!"

Turning as he spoke to a cash-box beside him, he rapidly counted out some twenty guineas in gold, then, fixing a stern, contemptuous gaze on the demoralised-looking being before him, he said, in clear, biting tones:

"Take that and begone! At once, too, if you wish to save your skin from the hangman and your sainted mother's name from disgrace. Remember,



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from henceforth you are no son of mine; I will not tolerate you on the premises, and herewith I solemnly disown and disinherit you! A son of mine, a son of hers to turn thief and murderer! Good God! how terrible!"

Then, seeing that the boy stood, as it were transfixed, with wide, staring eyes, tears frozen upon his cheeks, body and soul alike numbed by this unlooked-for harshness, the Marquis exclaimed, striking the table as he did so:

"Go! D'ye hear?"

Hear? Who could help hearing?

Stung by the taunting, cruel words, Jim's muscles relaxed, and with a cry of mingled anguish and bitterness, he fled from the room, leaving the gold untouched upon the table.

But, in passing along the corridors to his own chamber, he passed also the boundary that marks off youth from manhood, a transition full of danger when effected in the teeth of a father's maledictions, and with the sound of scaffold-making impelling one to instant action.

Yet there was no appearance of haste in Lord James Warner's movements as he changed the disguising costume for a thick, serviceable suit but lately returned from the tailor. Very quietly he gathered his few trinkets together and placed them with the miniature portraits of the Marquis and Marchioness, two changes of linen and the yokel's suit in a small portmanteau.

His mind was made up; he would take the coach which passed Brickington toll-bar at seven, and he would go abroad. He would be his own saviour from disgrace and death. So far so good.

Then his callow, untrained manhood counselled him to preserve his dignity at all costs, and, as banishment was a necessity, to make a virtue of it.

Still preserving a calm demeanour, young Jim sat down and wrote as follows:

To the most noble the Marquis of Pierhampton.

My Lord,—I write these few lines to inform you that I am leaving Hurstwick and the country at seven this morning, and you need be under no apprehension that I shall ever trouble you again. You have disowned me, and I, I have sworn solemnly to God that I will never acknowledge your relationship to me, and remain

Your lordship's obedient servant,

The Abbey, November, 1837.

JAMES.

Carefully sealing this document, with which he was evidently well pleased, he carried it to the bedside of the servant who usually attended upon him, but who had understood his young master would be absent for eight-and-forty hours, so had retired to his room at midnight.

"Beckton," said Jim, as he bent over the recumbent figure, "I'm back earlier than I expected. The fact is, if I can catch the coach at Brickington toll-bar at seven—and I've heaps of time—I shall be able to join people who are leaving for New York tomorrow. Don't disturb yourself; I've packed my traps—the less I take the better—and Mr. Ronaldson will walk to the coach with me. Say good-bye to everybody, Beckton, and tell them to keep up their spirits till I come back. The Marquis knows I'm going, but be sure you send this letter up to him with his shaving water."

Meanwhile Ronaldson, after creeping stealthily to his home in the High-street to remove his disguise, and, if possible, obtain money for his friend, was awaiting the result of Jim's interview with the Marquis at one of the side entrances to the Abbey.

Shivering in the chill of the November morning, with a guilty dread at his heart lest he should be pounced upon in the darkness by the avenger of blood, he was presently relieved to see Jim appear attired for travelling and carrying a portmanteau.

He did not speak to Tom, though aware of his presence, for, taking him by the arm, he hurried into the broad carriage-drive now flooded by the moonlight.

Tom was scared by his friend's unusual manner. That he was under the influence of strong emotion was very evident, but it was emotion in which regret and despair had no part.

Pausing in the centre of the drive and immediately in front of the Abbey the young nobleman uncovered his head, and in tones of deep and awe-striking solemnity, exclaimed:

"God do so to me, as I fear I have done to my poor playmate, if ever I return to Hurstwick, or ever again call the Marquis of Pierhampton father! The Almighty be my witness that as he has disowned me, I now and for ever disown him!"

Replacing his hat, he turned to the dumb-stricken Bonaldson.

"Tom, my good friend, good-bye. We have been a couple of fools and are like to pay dear for our folly. From henceforth our paths lie asunder. Never seek to know where I am nor what has become of me. Remember I am as truly dead to you from this time forward as though I hung on the gallows-tree. Go home. Forget this night—forget you have ever known me. I do not say 'change your ways,' you will do that without one word from me. Say nothing

to a living soul about to-night's work. I owe that much to the Marquis, and he knows nothing of your connection with it."

The two were hurrying down the long carriagedrive, and Jim spoke with great rapidity as though he feared interruption.

"That was Randall I shot, Tom, I told you so before. Poor fellow, he recognised me, he wanted to save me. God grant I have not killed him!" And the speaker's voice quivered with emotion. "We ought not to have left him, Tom; we might have saved him. Now it is too late—too late!"

Ronaldson more than once tried to speak, but Jim gave him no opening. With a catch in his breath he continued:

"For you all is well, and you need not scruple to throw blame upon me if suspicion points to you. Your hands are free from stain; as for me I go forth with the brand of Cain upon my brow!"

"No, no, dear Jim," cried Ronaldson, with breaking voice. "You must not say that; you only fired in self-defence."

"Bah!" returned the other, brusquely. "Had I any business there? But we won't waste the few minutes we have together; what's done can't be undone, more's the pity. Now I want you to execute one or two commissions for me, Tom. This "—and here the young lord took a tiny packet from his coatpocket—"is for Randall. Leave it at the South Lodge to-morrow—no, to-day, I mean. You will have to feign surprise at his illness. Pray God you find him alive. Tell the old folks if—well, if you can't see him—that as I was leaving the town for a time I

wished to give him a small parting gift in memory of the old days when he and I played together. It is my breast-brooch, the one set with eight rubies, and, if he should ever find himself in need—you see, Tom, I can't help hoping—it would bring him a few shillings; and if he gets well he will value it more than money. But you must never let him want."

"I never will," said Tom.

Then producing an unwieldy parcel carelessly wrapped in brown paper, the young nobleman proceeded.

"And this is the fateful bet. I could not leave it in my room; you must dispose of it."

Tom's fingers closed over the dead pheasant with a thrill of horror.

"I am taking the disguise with me," continued Jim, as though he feared the emotion under which he was labouring would overpower him. "I may find it useful, and it would not have been wise to leave it behind."

Tom was astonished at the methodical way his friend had gone to work; he appeared to have sealed up every avenue against suspicion.

Instinctively they hushed their voices as they passed the North Lodge, and just as they stepped on to Brickington highway St. Mary's chimes rang out the hour of six.

"I shall manage the coach comfortably, and when I'm outside it I can decide where to go."

Ronaldson, who knew himself to have been the prime mover in this disastrous affair, could not now restrain the evidences of his grief and exclaimed brokenly;

"But tell me, Jim, where may I write to you?"

"Tom, there will be no writing between us. I told you just now that from this time forth I am dead to you and to Hurstwick. My mind is quite made up. You heard my oath. When I enter the coach, indeed, now at this very moment, I am nameless and homeless."

"But, Jim, the Marquis did not mean what he said; he spoke in a passion, and will have repented before

to-morrow."

"He repent! He forgive! You don't know what you're talking about, Tom, and you don't know the Marquis either. I didn't till I went to his rooms just now. Bah! don't speak of him. He's not a man—mere skin and bone, with a tongue that bites and stings like a serpent's tooth. I was an ass to think he would help me."

"But a father can't disown his son, Jim; that is pure nonsense. Once a father always a father,

and once a son always a son."

"Just shut up, old fellow, and talk sense, or hold your tongue altogether. I know what I'm talking about. But it's time you got back; you've to go to bed, you know."

"Didn't the Marquis give you any money, Jim?"

said Ronaldson, anxiously.

"Give me money? Of course he did; but d'ye think I'd touch it?—sell my birthright like Esau for a matter of twenty pounds sterling? I shall do well enough without him and his money, and the beauty of it is I have now no position to maintain," and a hard laugh accompanied the harsh delivery.

Then, arrived at a turn in the road, from which the toll-gate was visible, the friends stopped, and Jim, taking Ronaldson's hand, said in tones vibrant with

resolve, "Understand, Tom, this is good-bye for ever, I'm never coming back."

"Oh, dash it all!" cried Ronaldson, now all but sobbing. "I'll come with you."

"If you try that game, Tom, I'll shoot myself. I mean what I say." Then in gentler voice the young lord proceeded, "No, you must stay here and do your best to make something out of life. I'm an old man since three o'clock this morning, yet I've no right to turn parson."

"But, Jim," besought Ronaldson, in choking tones, "I feel certain Boles is only stunned, and perhaps there's no great harm done to Randall; then you could come back, say in a year or two?"

"Never!" rejoined the other, with convincing emphasis—"never! Make no mistake, I'm never coming back!"

"But you must, Jim," implored the other; "I tell you what it is, I won't have my hair cut till you do!"

And the two parted at Brickington toll-gate with a hearty handgrasp and the cheerless laugh this mad little vow had raised; Tom's sole consolation the fact that, unsuspected by his friend, he had slipped a purse of £20 (the amount of the wager) into the traveller's coat-pocket.

But during the long coach ride young Jim (he was barely nineteen) had ample time to consider his position. And he did not disguise from himself that loneliness, heartache, possibly physical destitution, lay ahead. He saw himself a sapling loosened from its native soil by the wind of his own folly, uprooted by the hurricane of his father's anger. But as he recalled the stern and cruel words "Herewith I

solemnly disown and disinherit you," his young heart swelled afresh with wounded pride and bitter resentment, and for the third time he repeated the oath which cut him adrift from kith and kin. It seemed, indeed, an easy matter to cast off a father who lacked the most elemental instincts of fatherhood, while, as for his brothers, Jim had long abhorred their ways and shunned their company. And God, the universal Father, would not forsake him. What were those words his mother had taught him in childhood's days, "None of them that trust in Him shall be desolate." God was surely on his side; it was God he had called upon to witness and assist him in the keeping of his oath.

So reasoned Lord Jim with youth's pathetic ignorance of the many and marvellous possibilities of the mystery called Life. All his thoughts were directed to the keeping of his oath, and it never once occurred to him that a time might come when he would give all he possessed to be able to abjure it. Would He, Whose aid he now so confidently invoked, assist him then?

CHAPTER III.

Had you then
Discoursed with him,
Of his own business and the goings-on
Of earth and sky, then truly you had seen
That in his thoughts there were obscurities,
Wonder and admiration, things that wrought
Not less than a religion in his heart.

-Wordsworth.

It is the Vesper hour in the month of October, 1846, and the mountains clustering at the head of a magnificent valley in the Californian Sierras await with hushed, yet tremulous expectancy their nightly Farewell from the Sun-God. For one intense, brief moment, crimsoning beneath his glance they stand, mute, in rapt ecstacy, a shining throng.

Then with swift wing swoops Night, eager as a liberated bird of prey to snatch from the stricken Daylight its last vestiges of strength and beauty. Already in mournful monotones the falling waters chant its funeral dirge, and depression and desolation reign in that mountain-cluster, erstwhile a company of the glorified. The silver crags gleam harsh and cruel in the waning light, and the solitary human witness of these sharply-contrasted manifestations of glory and gloom, turns with a slight shiver to kindle the pile of wood lying near.

He stands on the broad, thick rim of a glacier-basin

10,500 feet above sea-level, and his choice of a camping ground bespeaks him an experienced campaigner, for the neighbouring pine-thicket will afford fire, shelter and bed, and the small lake in the hollow of the basin sweet drinking water and a refreshing bath.

As the flames mount from the kindled wood they illumine a strong, handsome face, a face which has evidently been in close contact with the fire of life. It is evident, too, that the man gives himself up entirely for the time being to whatever object demands his attention; but now, as he prepares a couple of mountain quail for his supper, his thoughts are manifestly dissociated from the work.

It may be the contact of his fingers with the wild creatures, it may be the shadow of the dwarfed-pine cast by the rising moon; but whatever the cause, this solitary being (none other than Lord James Bagshot Warner) is for the time transported by memory far, far from the Californian Alps to the heart of Old England, to his childhood's home at Hurstwick—the lovely Abbey of Pierton.

So far as he is aware the law of England has neither attempted, nor desired, to lay a finger upon him, and he is ignorant to this very hour of the consequences of that disastrous shot, which, aimed at old Boles, brought down both keepers. Yet he would give a great deal to know himself free from the the stain of homicide.

When, in fulfilment of his promise to the Marquis, "Lord Jim" left England, he took ship for Mexico, and enlisted there as a private in the army of Santa Anna under the name of James James. In 1840, at his own request, he was despatched, with his company, to Sonoma, California, with further orders from

Congress for the suppression of the Missions of the Dominican Fathers.

At Sonoma Jim met Don Guadeloupe Vallejo, Alcalde and collector for the Mexican Government. This Spaniard, anxious to perfect himself in the English language, and recognising Jim's superiority to the rare and average Englishman to be found in the country, offered him the post of tutor. Jim by this time could read, and also write, Spanish fairly well, and though glad to obtain his discharge from the Mexican army, then largely composed (particularly that part of it drafted to California) of dissolute creatures, entered upon his new duties with little ardour. His tastes were all for an outdoor life, and he barely concealed his contempt for the Californian indolence and frivolity, while their eternal fandangoes he loathed with his whole soul.

But Vallejo, then about thirty, quickly impressed him with his unique personality, and the acquaintance rapidly ripened to friendship, which unlocked for Jim the Spaniard's most valued possession—a small library of choice books, many of them English and Spanish translations. As these would have been denounced heretical by the Fathers, Vallejo concealed them from every one save his nephew, Don Alvaraldo.

This mine of enjoyment Jim was now invited to exploit, and therein discovered copies of works he remembered to have seen in the rooms of the Father Superior at the gigantic Religious Retreat in Puebla de los Angelos, Mexico; but they, unlike these, had every page torn or defaced. Evidently those had been given up by, or taken from, recluses.

So shallow had been his education before leaving England, so scant his opportunities for study since, Jim seized with avidity the mental food so unexpectedly placed before him; but the writers who from the first enchained his interest, and that of his intelligent host, were Werner and Hutton. Soon tutor and pupil were discussing with head and soul the question whether fire or water had produced the solids of the earth's crust. Were mountains gigantic crystals, or the upshot of waste material from the fiery womb of the world? So, on a small stage and with imperfect weapons, the battle of the Plutonists and Neptunists was fought away in the Far, Far West, Vallejo, with Werner, arguing strongly for the aqueous origin of rocks and mountains; Jim, with the Scotsman, contending with equal fierceness that their existence is due to volcanic upheaval.

At length Jim resolved to do that which his host's social and official duties debarred him from undertaking. He would obey the voice which now perpetually called him from valley and height; he would go and investigate for himself.

So—Vallejo aiding and abetting—it was decided that, with the meagre assistance obtainable from the rare and imperfect maps of the country, Jim should traverse the Coast Range from Mount Shasta to San Jacinto, thence take the Great Spanish Trail from Puebla to Santa Fé, and, leaving it midway, strike northwards to Lake Timpanogos, since known as Great Salt Lake. Should he have the luck to get so far, he was then to turn homewards, traverse the unknown region lying between the lake and the Sierra Nevadas, cross these latter, if possible about lat. 39°, and so reach Sacramento Valley and Sonoma.

This was no light undertaking, for beyond the risk attending the ascent of hitherto unscaled mountains

and unexplored regions, there were hostile Indians and wild beasts to be reckoned with. But an investigator welcomes difficulties and ignores dangers; and days, weeks, and months passed in a life to Jim of indescribable charm.

Meanwhile these same months were adding an important chapter to the history of the United States, and the happy-go-lucky California Lord Jim had known was rapidly slipping from the loose grasp of Mexico. In '42 Commodore Jones had audaciously hoisted the American flag on the Pacific Coast, while Colonel Freemont had struck at the heart of the country from its eastern side.

Though the Californians were by no means in accord with their Mexican rulers, they naturally resented these intrusions, yet from sheer indolence did little more.

When, however, Freemont, in June of the very year which finds Jim on the Nevadas, seized on the horses of the Military Commandante midway between San Rafael and Santa Clara, captured the Sonoma Presidio, and proclaimed California a dependence of the United States, the Californians rushed to arms only to meet disaster and defeat.

Jim was in the vicinity of Vegas de Santa Clara—the halting-place of the California and New Mexico caravans—when he first heard of the probabilities of war, and at once decided he would go no further eastwards.

Lake Timpanogos should be abandoned, and this, not because he felt any desire to take up arms for either side, but solely because he was seized with the misgiving that the safety of the only property he really valued, and therefore would not carry about with him, might now be endangered. As the American

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AN OATH IN HEAVEN.

Freemont had actually crossed the Nevadas, Jim determined to find a way over them to the San Joaquin Valley and thence to Sacramento and Sonoma.

Turning sheer westwards, he made direct for what is now known as Owen's Lake, to the west of which tower the domes and pinnacles of the Highest Sierras. When actually upon the mountains he found it almost impossible to leave them, so greatly did they interest and fascinate him. Whence, he asked himself again and again, came those frozen seas over which he tramped, whence those huge boulders standing here and there? Monuments, surely, they of a living, seething flood.

And he knew not that one Perraudin had long puzzled over that same question upon his native Alps, and had already solved it. Yet, novice as he was in geological lore, Jim was quick to detect the flow of the immense ice-rivers, and gauge their enormous silent force by the natural passes they had carved for themselves through or around all obstacles.

As to the superior merits of either the Huttonian or Wernerian theories he was unable to arrive at any decision. What impressed him most was his own colossal ignorance, his unspeakable littleness.

When the splendours of dawn and sunset displayed themselves; when the atmosphere about him was suffused (like an over-full heart) with the most delicate and tender colourings; when his eye rested enchanted on the virgin whiteness of snow-clad pinnacle and dome; when he stood unattended in the vast solitudes beneath beetling precipice, or groped his way cautiously along the edge of some gigantic cañon; when his gaze was directed to his only canopy—" the beauty



AN OATH IN HEAVEN.

of heaven with his glorious show,"—the grandeur, dignity, sweetness, and sublimity of the Eternal Thought as contrasted with his own petty pretensions, humbled him to the very dust. What a piece of rhodomontade that oath he had so solemnly sworn, and which he had hitherto regarded with the commingled satisfaction of the anchorite, as he feels the smart of self-flagellation, and the savage, as his eye rests on the retaliatory wounds he has inflicted on his enemy! How small, how pitifully mean, that note in which, in stilted phrase, he had so glibly renounced his Godgiven birthright!

As day followed day "the still small voice of the level twilight" made its pathetic appeal to him to repudiate his vow, to write to the Marquis acknowledging his relationship and beg him to let bygones be bygones. So it came to pass that in the solitudes of the Highest Sierras Lord James Bagshot Warner determined to rid his soul of that loathly oath as soon as he should regain the haunts of men. At Sonoma the renunciatory letter should be written. True, he could not by any manner of means bring himself to regard the Marquis with anything like filial affection, but his heart no longer held any bitterness towards him. "The flakes of scarlet clouds burning like watch fires in the green sky of the horizon" had slowly but surely consumed the canker of hatred and revenge, and now Jim was anxious to translate and transmit to his father the new feelings that animated his breast. So determined, he creeps to his bed-chamber of stunted pine this early October night, and with the first streak of dawn he leaves it next morning, disturbing as he does so his room-mates the sparrows. In the little lake, one of the full bowls of the glacier basin, he

takes his morning dip, and breakfasts afterwards on the remnants of his last night's supper.

Then he stands for a moment to give a last look at the unique beauty surrounding him. How he loved these Alps! As the sun rose higher fresh beauties were disclosed. The highest peaks no longer stood alone like burning islands in a sea of liquid night. From Jim's point of vantage lakes one after another revealed themselves, sparkling like diamonds of every size and shape. Sharp, slender columns rearing themselves towards the south caught on their northern side and returned the sun's greeting, while beyond them a caravan of white veiled mountains filled up the whole horizon, summit after summit standing atip-toe to look over the shoulder of its more advanced companion.

But Jim's path lay westwards and downwards, and speedily called upon him to take heed to his goings. Often was he in peril of death, often he had perforce to retrace his steps, often he paused to examine the tokens left by fire or water upon rock or soil; but by nightfall he had reached the first belt of vegetation. Instead of the snow-fields he now had to steer his course through forests of superb pines, whose branches were divided with the mathematical regularity of toy trees.

Here he fell in with a party of Indians retreating to their stronghold in the mountains, a retreat they believed undiscoverable by the white man, but which he now knows and delights in as the Yosemite Valley. They not only supplied him with jerked bear's meat and cooked beans, but gave him the very latest news from the seat of war. The whole country was up in arms, they said. Monté-Rey, Yerba Buena, Santa

Barbara, Los Angeles, and Sonoma were in the hands of the Americans, who had seized all horses and cattle at the presidios and missions. Don Vallejo had been taken prisoner, but released on parole after six days' captivity. There was fighting, too, in New Mexico; and Santa Fé, it was reported, had fallen to the invaders.

These tidings decided Jim to strike a bargain with the old Indian chief, Tenaya, for a fleet horse and sack He then pushed forward, and forty-eight hours after leaving the Indians found himself on the Foot Hills of the Nevadas. Here, among the Big Trees, progress was less rapid, and in his search for a trail, however faint, his attention and interest were claimed by tokens, as he conjectured, of a primeval river-bed. Could he have stumbled upon the bed of one of the four immense subterranean rivers upon which tradition said the Nevadas stood? Tethering his horse to a black oak-tree, he stooped to make a closer inspection, when the sudden, unnatural darkening of the air and a faint moan, assured him that a human being was in extremis in his near vicinity.

Hurriedly rising, he ran towards a ragged-looking object he descried at the entrance to one of the cross-valleys, the rocky sides of which were still clothed with manzanita and chamiso. On closer inspection the ragged object resolved itself into a man in a state of collapse, both legs broken, torn and bleeding. No wonder the vultures hovered expectantly about him, but Jim would balk them of their prey.

Fortunately he had taken the precaution to replenish his water-flask before leaving the heights, and now, partially filling his horn-oup therefrom, he added half the contents of a phial of agua ardente Vallejo had

given him.

With infinite difficulty he administered the draught, and when at length signs of returning consciousness were apparent, he was quite unprepared for the token of joyful recognition which leapt into the dimmed eyes of the sufferer as they rested upon his benefactor. The stranger was evidently an Englishman and not, as Jim had at first conjectured, an American. Yes, he certainly knew those rugged features, though he could not at once give a name to their owner.

But memory assisted him, and as he cried "Why, Isaac, how come you here?" he recognised in the wounded man one of two brothers named Bennett, who formed part of the crew of the vessel in which he shipped for Mexico nine years ago. The men were so superior to the ordinary drinking sailor then employed that Jim had quickly conceived a liking for them, and had more than once shielded them from the wrath of the fiery little Mexican captain. Strange that one of the brothers should turn up here and now! But stranger still, after giving a brief account of himself, is the request Bennett makes that "Mr. James" shall accept certain specified property of his to be found "in a cave, back of Big Tree yonder," on the understanding that all else he finds there he will have conveyed to Sarah Bennett, Isaac's only sister now in England. Jim finds little difficulty in acceding to a request made under such sad conditions, but where in England is the woman to be found? "Miss Sarah Bennett?" he commences. "No, no," the dying man feebly murmurs. "Randall-Mrs. Fred Randall-letters tell." "Fred Randall?" At the mention of that name "Lord Jim" started as though

he had been shot, but Bennett was going fast. Letters he had mentioned. "Where are the letters?" cried Jim, in such compelling tones that the sufferer, brought back to consciousness for a brief moment, sighed rather than said, "S'n Carlos." And Jim, who had bent to catch the feeble articulation, saw a smile flicker over the ashen face and found himself alone with the dead.

"Blessed, thrice-blessed Bennett," he exclaimed, "who in the very act and circumstance of death has established my innocence and given me peace."

CHAPTER IV.

But these, their gloom, the mountains and the bay, The whole land weighed him down as Ætna does The Giant in Mythology. THE LOVER'S TALE.

This chance encounter with Bennett, involving the trusteeship which (in utter ignorance of its magnitude) he had so readily undertaken, made it impossible for Jim to carry out his intention of going direct to Sonoma. On visiting the cave containing the dead man's property he immediately realised that the business of getting it to the sea-coast for shipment would demand not merely skill and secrecy but almost superhuman strength. But Jim was no carpetknight, and, like all good travellers, resourceful and methodical. Moreover, he was now consumed by the desire to prove beyond question whether Fred Randall-his Fred Randall-were indeed alive; and in making for the little port of Monté-Rey it would be necessary to pass the Mission of San Carlos, where Bennett had said informing letters were to be seen. It was not, however, till the second day after Jim had buried Isaac beneath a black oak-tree that he and the small team he had collected, and which consisted of the horse he had bargained for with the Indians and two mules, set out to pick its painful way across the pathless and parched valley of the Lower San Joaquin. Much valuable time was lost in seeking for a ford, which, when found, landed the little convoy on the upper part of the Great Tulare Plain.

Here troops of antiered elk and deer were frequently encountered, as well as bands of wild horses. When these latter, in their search for food or water, rushed past like a mountain torrent, making the very ground beneath them to shake, Jim had the utmost difficulty in preventing his team from making a stampede and joining their rampant brethren. But what a glorious picture they made, with their glossy flanks, arched necks, and flowing manes and tails!

Then, as he neared the valleys of the Coast Range, wolves, or rather coyotes, were not wanting to add to his troubles, so that by day and by night he was compelled to an almost ceaseless vigilance. Of food he got little, and that very irregularly—fish when he rested his animals near water and a bird once in a way, for though the valley abounded in game, Jim dared not leave his team for five minutes.

Now and again he fell in with a stray traveller or two who seemed as anxious to avoid him as he was to evade their notice, but to his surprise he saw nothing of the armed forces of either belligerent party.

The reason was explained when he set foot on the Coast Range. He learned then from the vagrant Indians (who, having been freed by the Mexican Government—i.e., disbanded from their homes at the various missions—now roamed shelterless and incapable upon the lands they were supposed to own and cultivate) that the fighting was concentrated on and about San Pedro, Los Angeles, and San Diégo.

The forces of both parties were all focussed in that

neighbourhood, they said, so that in Monté-Rey there was scarcely an American or Californian left capable of bearing arms.

This was good news to Jim, and encouraged him to push forward in the hope of reaching the little port before the conquering army returned there.

But he was well-nigh spent, exhausted mentally and physically. The intense heat of the valley, now the clammy, penetrating damp of the coast fogs, anxiety, sleeplessness, and want of proper food, all combined to undermine his splendid strength. And in the wake of departing strength his confidence in the wisdom and feasibility of the plans he had formed departed. While his beasts rested, he had ample time to consider, and re-consider his position, and by degrees he managed to convince himself that he had too hastily accepted as a fact the implication contained in Bennett's last words that Randall lived. And even if Randall lived, Boles might have succumbed to that night's injuries. But the letters the dying man had referred to, letters he had said were at San Carlos Mission—they would give him definite information on these points. He must have their testimony before he could, or indeed ought to, permit himself to rejoice in his own bloodguiltlessness. Yet Bennett had even forgotten in those last moments that his sister was about to marry, what more likely than that he had substituted Randall's name by mistake for the true bridegroom's? The letters would clear up that point, but was it likely, urged Probability, that he would ever find those letters? Would the Fathers have taken the trouble to preserve the belongings of a man who left the Mission without a farewell, and had given no hint of any intention to return? Why, San Carlos

itself had, in all likelihood, been dismantled since Bennett left it for the valley! Numbers of the Missions, abandoned eight or ten years back, were even now crumbling to dust, and Jim recalled with dismay, that when he set out for his tour of investigation an imperative order for the sale of all the others by public auction had been received from the Mexican Congress. Congress orders were not always enforced in California, but if San Carlos had fallen under the hammer, or a prey to private cupidity, then farewell to all hope of finding Bennett's letters.

The rainy season had commenced, and November was a week old when Jim and his convoy rounded a mountain spur at the foot of which lay the crumbling Mission buildings of San Juan Bautista distant, as he was well aware, only some thirty miles from Monté-Rey. Though he could detect no token of man's presence there, the place had for him a homelike look, and was not without picturesqueness when viewed from the height.

The early sunlight glanced tenderly over the decaying adobe, church and houses, but was caught and reflected by the wild oats and mustard, which disputed territorial rights where not so long ago the graceful maize had responded with a grander music to the invisible baton of Æolus.

In the two princely gardens, each from fifteen to twenty acres in extent, the Californian poppy flaunted, as it had never dared to do under the regime of the Fathers; the hundred, or rather thousand, fruit-trees which lined the walks and walls were now the orchestra of myriad bees and wasps; decaying apricots and peaches, to say nothing of apples and pears, strewed the ground which vine-tendrils and wild convolvulus

were doing their best to conceal with an impenetrable net-work

After passing San Juan Bautista, Jim found the road fairly defined, and as it rose but gently, it was easy travelling for the animals; but their backs, especially the mules, were sore, and one of the latter was lame. Soon, however, they would be able to rest, and with that possibility now within measurable distance Jim strove to keep up his spirits and encourage the poor beasts.

At sunrise on the second morning after leaving San Juan, he crested the last hill-top from whence (oh! welcome sight!) as far as the eye could reach, the sparkling waters of the Pacific were distinctly visible. Never did sweeter music fall on the ears of homeless Jim than that made by the roll of its mighty breakers on the beach.

Like armies whispering, where great echoes be.

Below him stretched the green lawn on which the white-plastered, red-tiled adobe dwellings constituting Monté-Rey stood; there the low presidio from which now waved "the Stars and Stripes"; to the south the dense wood of pines he knew so well; and here, in nearest proximity, the valley of Carmel and the cluster of buildings known as the Mission of San Carlos.

Suddenly, in obedience to an unconscious impulse, Jim was upon his knees, a "thank God" upon his lips, for out on the still, morning air floated the tones of the matin bell. God be praised, San Carlos was not then deserted!

A moment later ocean and town were swallowed up as completely as though they had never existed by the thick coast fog, which at the same time converted the cheerful call to prayer to the muffled tones of a passing bell.

At mid-day the fog lightened somewhat, but just as Jim was preparing to take advantage of the change, his quick ear detected the sound of galloping hoofs behind. Who could be coming, friend or foe? Surely all risk of harm to himself, his beasts, or the treasure was over and done with now!

Whoever the comer might be he was well mounted, for he covered the ground rapidly. Soon horseman and steed loomed large through the now quickly lifting fog, and then, to his intense relief, Jim recognised the features of Thomas O. Larkin, Esq., first, and as it proved last, U.S. Consul at Monté-Rey. He could not be mistaken, for no other man of Jim's acquaintance wore his hair as did Mr. Larkin.

The exigencies of hard travel, even war itself, had been powerless to disturb the thick cannon-like curl, which, by a skilful union and twist of front locks with those from the back of the head rested above each ear and, supported from below by a shorter, more elegant convolution of the whisker, gave to the otherwise bare face of their owner the appearance of a light battery.

But there was no sign of recognition on Mr. Larkin's countenance as he reined up beside the now stationary team and scrutinised the features of the man in charge of it.

- "Friend or foe?" he cried.
- "Mr. Larkin, don't you know me?"
- "No, can't say I do, but you've got an animal there I should like to have a nearer acquaintance with," and the Consul pointed to the Indian steed.
 - "Surely I've not changed beyond all recognition,

Mr. Larkin? I think, at any rate, your brother, Mr. Cooper, would know me, and Don Vallejo, too, I trust, spite of my travel-stains," returned Jim, ignoring the allusion to his beast.

"Why, it's James!" returned Larkin, with evident pleasure. "But you're a changed man, and no mistake. You're getting back from your exploring tour, of course, of course. And you've had experiences and hair-breadth escapes, of course. And they change a man like the very devil. We've had experiences, too, since you left us, I can tell you. But you've not been forgotten, James. It was only the last time I saw Vallejo we spoke of you, and wondered whether you were in the body or out of the body. He guessed you'd turn up all right, and so you have!"

"Ah! how is Vallejo?" inquired Jim, anxious to divert his companion's thoughts from his team.

"Oh, he's all right," returned Larkin, now walking his horse to suit the slower movements of the burdened animals. "Freemont lodged him in Sutter's Fort for six days last June and then let him out on parole. Vallejo's always been in favour of shunting the Mexicans, as you know, and he's a man of his word, which is more than can be said either of Flores or Castro. By the bye, Vallejo sent a small chest of your belongings to my house at Monté-Rey when the Sonoma troubles began."

Jim's spirits rose, but concealing his delight he said, "I'm much obliged to him and to you, too, sir. As you see, I'm desperately hard up for a change of garments, and all I possess in that line is in that chest."

"But what have you here?" and Larkin's gaze was again directed to the sacks and their bearers. Then, as though conscious he had asked a foolish question, he answered himself and Jim did not contradict.

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"Specimens, of course. I got it out of Vallejo one day what you were after; but I warn you, James, that he and the whole lot of us are far too busy to look at sands and gravels. We're fighting in dead earnest now and haven't time to give a second or first thought either to Pluto or Neptune. And, James, I can't linger now, and you can't hurry. Like you, I'm but just returned from the mountains, though I have only been to the foot of them."

In answer to Jim's inquiring look Larkin proceeded, "I had notice that an emigrant party was crossing by Freemont's Pass (he crossed there in '42, soon after you left us), and I rode out in the hope of meeting it and enlisting the men at once for Freemont's battalion. But I left my little Maisie very ill, and am most anxious about her and all the others. So you see how I'm placed."

"Pray don't let me detain you, sir," urged Jim, wishing devoutly that since Larkin could not help him he would ride forward, but Larkin still lingered.

"You must come to us to-night, James," he said.
"I can't promise you anything better than pot luck, but we'll share and share alike."

"You're very kind, but I couldn't think of intruding upon Mrs. Larkin in this disreputable condition, I really couldn't. You've sickness in the house, too. Besides, I hardly think I shall get as far as Monté-Rey to-night. I had made up my mind to try to get shelter at San Carlos. To-morrow I shall certainly look you up and tell you my adventures."

"There's only the mad padre at San Carlos. You know the Mission was sold last year, but the owner, like the rest of us, has been too busy to set new wheels in motion. The padre will give you a decent shake

down, I've no doubt, and as I said just now, I don't know how things are at home. I'm told the Californians have set a price on my head, but that doesn't trouble me. I've got a good nag here who ought to carry me out of all danger, but it's like drawing blood from a stone to get hold of a horse in these times. This one is only loaned to me, and I'm under a written covenant to pay fifty dollars—did you ever know such a figure?—if anything happens to it. Things are different nowadays to what they were. You've got a nice little thing there, James," and Mr. Larkin, to Jim's annoyance, again indicated the Indian steed. He would be feeling the sacks next.

Suddenly turning in his saddle the American exclaimed, "Ah! there's my man, Slater, at last!"

And Jim, turning, too, saw a horseman on the hill-top behind.

"He's on the very devil of a mount, and I was getting quite anxious about him. Well, James, I must press on, and I won't forget to send a Kanaka along to San Carlos with your box as soon as I reach home. Say, will you do me the favour to exchange your animal there for Slater's here? Slater's will do your business just as well, you know."

The astute American had from the first cast a covetous eye on Jim's horse, and would long since have excused himself and continued his journey but that he hoped to effect an exchange of animals by waiting till his servant overtook him.

Jim had really no objection to offer. Slater's beast certainly would manage the slower pace and the few remaining miles to San Carlos. But he himself removed the baggage while Slater, with evident delight, saddled and bridled his new acquisition. "I won't forget your trunk. Now, Slater, we can keep closer to each other, which will be better for both of us. Yes, yes, James, we're in for rain, as you say, and you won't be sorry to have dry clothes waiting at San Carlos when you arrive. I wish you'd leave your rubbishy stones and come and fight under our flag, though I can't say you look very fit. See what you're like after a night's rest. I'll expect you to-morrow."

Again Jim was alone on the hill-slope feeling a veritable hypocrite. Yet surely the present was an inopportune moment for speaking of his trust!

To-morrow he would see Larkin and consult with him as to the best way of shipping it off. By tomorrow he would know whether Randall and Boles were living or dead, for since San Carlos was standing surely the letters were safe. Again hope sang lustily, the letters would be in his grasp before nightfall.

But circumstances were still adverse. Scarcely were Larkin and his servant out of sight than the rain came down, as it does there in the rainy season, four days' ordinary rain being launched on the earth in as many hours. Wet to the skin in spite of the shelter they were compelled to seek beneath the pines, Jim and his beasts made such slow progress that it was near midnight when, having passed through a wide gateway, they reached the open square on three sides of which the Mission buildings and church of San Carlos were ranged.

Eagerly but fruitlessly Jim scanned the doorways and grated holes which served as windows in both lower and upper storeys. Had he indeed at length reached San Carlos to find it a city of the dead?

CHAPTER V.

I stand as one that after darkness feels
The twilight, all the air is promise-flushed
Yet strangely chill, and though the sense delight
In sweet deliverance, something in the blood
Gries for the sun.

-BAYARD TAYLOR.

In vain Jim halloed: the hollow square alone seemed stirred to respond, and that with the most ghostly of echoes.

The stillness, as of death, oppressed him with a foolish terror which made the blacker depths of darkness beneath the eaves the lurking place of mocking evil spirits.

His courage, which had never yet failed him, disappeared altogether, and Hope herself slunk out of sight abashed by this unlooked-for delay. Again and again she had assured him that, having overcome all difficulties and dangers, Sarah Bennett's letters would be within his grasp ere night fell. And since his rencontre with Mr. Larkin he had looked forward to the certainty that he and his beasts would enjoy a long and well-earned rest.

True, he was late in arriving, but then Larkin's messenger would have informed the padre that he Jim, was on his way and might be expected at any moment. Things must have changed even while Larkin was absent in the valley. Perhaps

the purchaser or an administradore had put in an appearance and turned out the padre.

But food and shelter must be had, for the rain still came down pitilessly, though not as copiously as on the hill-side. Twice Jim walked his team across the square, halting the second time at the fountain in the centre to give the animals water. He meanwhile ran up the steps to and along the gallery upon which the sleeping apartments of the Fathers and responsible officers of the Mission gave. He knew the latter had long since departed, but surely some caretaker might be within earshot. Still silence, except when Jim broke it with a thunderous knock at every door he came to.

The whole length of the gallery was traversed, and then Jim returned to his team uncertain what to do. Shelter of a sort might be had beneath the gallery, but food and warmth were even of greater importance at this moment. With the reins again between his cold fingers Jim stood irresolute. Should he go on to Monté-Rey and Larkin? That seemed the wisest, indeed the only thing to do.

But just as he had decided to do this, his eye caught a faint glimmer of light beneath the door of the church, and Hope sprang up once more. The mad padre might be holding vigil there. Still grasping the leading-rein Jim crossed to the church, and to his intense relief found the door unsecured.

Weird and ghostly looked the barn-like building in the sole light of the six candles burning upon the altar at the extreme end, the altar itself, to Jim's amazement, being heavily draped in black. Surely this was neither All Souls' Day nor yet Good Friday?

With a mildly approbative ray the candle-light

gleamed upon the devils who, in the horrible picture of Hell, for which San Carlos was famous and which the Fathers had found so effectual in making converts, were busy pitch-forking the unbaptized into quenchless fires. The less effective convert-making picture of Paradise which hung above was lost in the pervading darkness, a darkness that deepened to gloom in the long, empty nave, and etherealised the tawdry dress of a Madonna or Saint placed upon bracket or pedestal in remote corners.

The silence was more oppressive here than in the square outside, and Jim, who had swung the door back upon its hinges, cast a searching comprehensive glance over the whole interior and satisfied himself that he was alone in the building.

As he was about to close the door his quick eye all at once distinguished a moving, shapeless object near the north wall of the nave and well outside the radius of the candle light. What could it be? Black even amidst blackness: no human being could be so shapen, or rather so misshapen, as this moving mass! Jim, overwrought by excitement, disappointment, and fatigue, would have fled forthwith into the rain and wholesome darkness of the night, when impulse and steps were arrested by the tones of a human voice.

And what a voice! Such tenderness, such sweetness, such strength, such yearning could alone proceed from Spanish lips and an aching heart.

Jim's mind was at once relieved. This would be the mad padre, as the *dévote* Geronimo Encarnacion was usually styled, and whom Jim had occasionally seen and spoken to when he had visited Monté-Rey. He had been sorely affected by the dispersion of the Indians, for whom he had felt a fatherly and fraternal affection, and had greatly taken to heart the secularisation of the Missions. The successive changes which had reduced them to a condition of powerlessness and destitution he was never tired of ascribing to the lack of holiness and zeal in priests and people, and his constant upbraidings, together with his unalterable determination to remain at San Carlos until he should be literally turned out of its doors, had made him a remarkable personality at this juncture.

But the somewhat misleading sobriquet, "mad," had been conferred upon him by his detractors from his habit of thinking aloud, or, as they styled it, preaching to himself in some lonely spot.

Spellbound Jim listened to the melodious syllables, which, as they fell upon the silence and the gloom, reminded him of the liquid music of the heights. But what words were these? Mystified and apprehensive he stole noiselessly up the church forgetful of the reins between his fingers.

And this is what he saw beside a small, square picture on the wall as his eyes accustomed themselves to the darkness. The clear-out profile of a haggard, tonsured face, a figure, whose proper shape was bent and obscured by a huge wooden cross, in which sharp, headless nails had been fixed and were pressing, nay, piercing, the tender flesh whose sole shield was the thin, black garb of the penitent.

And this is what Jim heard:

"Oh, sweet and adorable Jesus, why shouldst Thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night? Thou who didst tread the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with Thee, suffer me, oh, I beseech Thee, suffer me who am the least of all Thy servants to

taste this night of the cup Thou didst drink of. Suffer me, oh, suffer me to die, even as Thou didst, for the sins of this backsliding people—to be their Redeemer, their Saviour!"

The unutterable yearning of the speaker's tones quite unmanned Jim, who, unconscious that he had fallen upon his knees, was also unaware that his three beasts had ranged themselves behind him, their footfalls returning no echo from the earthen floor.

They, tossing weary heads and lifting remonstrant hoofs in the church porch, had gladly responded to what appeared to them the double invitation to shelter and food afforded by the open door and the connecting reins.

But the padre, after a short interval, is again speaking.

"Is it not expedient, O sweet Jesus, that now, as in the old Judean days, one should die for the people? Yea? Thou answerest yea? Ah! what, what can I render to Thee for thus graciously accepting my life? 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, oh, my God.' And now I beseech Thee accompany me through the via dolorosa, the via crucis, and when I die beneath the cross receive me to Thy kingdom in glory!"

A look of ecstacy irradiated the worn face of the priest as, rising, he chanted a verse of the rhythmic hymn prescribed by the Roman Church for the office of "the Way of the Cross."

Sancta Mater istud agas, Crucifixi figi plagas Cordi mio valide.

Jim, too, had risen and, aware for the first time that the three beasts were actually in the church and standing meekly behind him, he dimly recognised the incongruity of the situation, and was able in some measure to account for the padre's evident insensibility to his surroundings.

Something, however, must be done, and that at once. The enthusiast, now performing an act of self or vicarious abnegation, and contemplating giving or taking (surely synonym and antonym were here strangely confounded) his own life, was the only being to whom Jim could apply for the Bennett letters.

But on the ground merely of common humanity he must not permit this devotee to die before his eyes. Moreover, Jim was himself sick unto death, not alone with hope deferred, but with fatigue, anxiety, hunger and cold. The beasts, too, were well-nigh spent. In the interests of all Jim must interfere without further delay.

The padre, now at the "Fifth Station" and within the outer radius of the candle-light, made scarcely any effort to support the huge cross, but allowed it rather to press and press, and pierce and pierce, for Jim could now see drops of blood falling down to the ground.

Sickened at the sight and horrified at the thought which flashed upon him as a revelation that the man, without doubt, intended literally to die beneath the the cross, Jim sprang forward and gently, lest the nails should rankle in the wounds, lifted the heavy rood and placed it against the wall.

"Padre Geronimo," he began, but could add no more, for the momentary look of bewilderment on the face of the *dévote* was immediately followed by one of keenest disappointment, as falling on his knees, he exclaimed in accents of sweet reproachfulness, "Unworthy, unworthy! Thou deemest me unworthy!"

But Jim, raising the suppliant, drew him, as well as the beasts, into the fuller light, and anxious to cover the possible confusion of the padre, commenced in rapid tones to explain his intrusion.

"My father," he said, pointing to the patient burdened creatures whose dumb endurance contrasted eloquently with the contemplated sacrifice of the priest, "I crave your pardon, with shelter and food for myself and these. We come from the other side of the valley; I, indeed, from beyond the snowy mountains. We are wet to the skin. I have not touched food for twenty-four hours, and it is too late to go on to Monté-Rey. Of your charity and for the love of God give us aid. Come," and he put his hand within the padre's, "show us where we may find food and warmth. My name is James, and——"

"Ah! Señor James?" interrupted the priest upon whose abstraction the touch of Jim's feverish hand had acted like magic, "Pardone——"

But Jim heard no more, for, seized by sudden faintness, he swayed and would have fallen had not the priest caught and supported him.

When he next opened his eyes he was wrapped in blankets and lying on a pallet bed in a small, cell-like apartment destitute of all other furniture save a settle, a crucifix on the wall, and an image of the Virgin before which a lamp was burning.

He was at once sensible of a pleasing warmth stealing over his body, and presently recognised that it proceeded from some warm object at his feet, probably a heated brick.

A box which seemed strangely familiar stood on the rough settle within reach, but as he stretched out his arm to take and examine it more closely he realised

for the first time, with something like horror, that Bennett's treasure was no longer in his possession. He must at once go and find it. But essaying to do so, he fell back with a groan. His lower limbs refused all movement except at a frightful cost of pain. Strong man that he was, exposure, fatigue, and anxiety had at length worked their will and rendered him not only helpless, but pain-ridden.

Oh, that gold! Why had he been so foolish as to make that promise to Bennett? It might even now have been carried off where he might never find it. Indeed he, Jim, was perhaps even now a prisoner of the mad padre; for was he not a heretic and of the race of the hated invaders of the land?

Tortured and impotent lay Jim when the door of the apartment opened and the padre himself appeared bearing upon his shoulders one of the heavy sacks, which he deposited on the floor at the foot of the bed. Then, glancing at its occupant, a delightful smile lit up the worn face as he exclaimed:

"Good, good! Nay, lie still, my son. I come back to you at the moment. *Paciencia*, *paciencia*!" And before Jim could speak the priest had vanished, only to return again as he said "at the moment" with a basin of steaming *atole*.

"There, my son! Drink, and by the help of our Blessed Lady, we will get back the lost strength and send away the fever-ague. Nay, nay, talk not! I know you have much to tell me, but I go now to fetch all your properties; it is well that you have them with your eye on. See, I place them here."

And Jim judged that the little room he occupied led out of the church, for the priest soon had all the sacks "with Jim's eye on them." "Mi padre," he said, "you are too good: it is I who should be caring for you."

"Nay, nay, my son. You came as our Blessed Lord to me, and you say for Him, 'Work, do not die for Me; to work is better.' And so I live. Nay, say me no thanks. But read here your letter which a Kanaka bring with this box for you. As for me, I go now to take away the poor beasts from the church and find them some oats."

Jim's eyes lit up with pleasure at sight of the letter, which proved to be from Mr. Larkin; but before opening it, he said, "Father Geronimo, I have much to say to you, a strange story to tell."

"Nay, my son; first I must to the beasts, then to ring the matin bell, and then, though none will come," he said, sorrowfully, "I offer the Blessed Sacrifice of the Mass. After that I come to you and bring you some pozzoli. Read and sleep, paciencia, paciencia, my son, and we will get rid of the fever-ague. Benedicite, Benedicite." And the priest was gone, to return Jim knew not when.

Larkin's letter read as follows:

DEAR JAMES,—It's lucky you didn't come on here. Wife and children left by ship for San Francisco three days ago; too frightened to stop, for there's not an American, or Galifornian either, left in the place. Slater and I follow on horseback to-night. Hope to God I shall find them all right, and Maisie recovered. Gan't you join us? Anyway, hope to see you on our return, though with things in this muddle can fix no date.—Yours in haste,

Thos. O. LARKIN.

"I shall have to manage single-handed," was Jim's comment; "yet here I am tied by the leg." He tossed restlessly as he realised the impossibility of getting himself and his treasure away without extraneous aid. Yet where was he to obtain help? Vallejo a

prisoner on parole, his power and authority as alcalde temporarily if not permanently gone, Larkin at San Francisco, no one of any position left in Monté-Rey.

To exhibit gold in sacks either to Californian or American at this critical political moment would be to ensure its loss. Each would claim it as treasure-trove and requisition it for public if not private ends. The owner of the Mission, too, might appear at any moment; would it be possible to hide the gold then?

It was maddening to lie here helpless and inert, and this condition of mind only increased the body's indisposition. The brain craved for complete rest; instead it was called upon to settle matters of the highest importance, to make a path through a very tangle-wood of difficulties.

"I must consult with the padre," was Jim's final decision, "and he must find me those letters. At last!" he exclaimed aloud, as the door of the little chamber opened and the priest entered bearing a basin of pozzoli.

"Now, my son, this good mess of peas, beans, and maize will help you much." Jim waved it impatiently away.

"I'm mad with anxiety; I thought you were never coming back. Now listen."

And the padre, seeing that remonstrance was useless, seated himself on the rough settle and with a hand caressing as a woman's parted the thick hair upon Jim's heated brow. Yet those wounds on his own back and shoulders! And the face gave no token of their presence, though the slightest pressure must produce an exquisite torture.

"That's better," said Jim, more calmly. "Now do you remember the wreck of the Falcon about two

years ago? You must remember it?" And the speaker paused in anxious expectancy while the priest said, musingly:

"The Falcon? Would that be the sloop that should have carried our last cargo of hides and was lost in a 'south-easter' off Point Pinos? You see, I had not to do with the hides—I—for the church—Father Antonio for the hides."

"Yes," interrupted Jim, "but you must have known about the Falcon; everybody perished but one man, and he came here, father, and his little chest was saved; and you nursed him, and he got well, and then he went away over the mountains to the valley."

"Well, my son, and what of him?" questioned the padre, with a sudden darkening of the face as he noted the feverish eagerness of the man before him—a man doubtless who had a crime to confess, though he would hardly have thought it. "Have you stolen from him?" he continued, "have you perhaps killed him?"

"Good God, father, what do you take me for?" cried Jim, fairly enraged, and spite of bodily pain now in a sitting posture. "Am I a man or a devil? Do I look like a murderer?"

Then flashed upon him the memory of Feringham Wood and he became quieter. Poor fellow, he could not know how the past four weeks had changed him. Larkin even had not recognised him, though Bennett had known him at once.

"I crave your pardon, Señor James," said the priest in calm tones, "but seeing your anxiety to make confession, and seeing also that you have with you three sacks of gold ——"

"Ah! you have examined them," said Jim, drily. "Well, you shall learn how they came into my possession."

"First, my son, I will tell you how I know you have gold. I unfasten the blanket on the poor horse hoping to find oats for the beasts and so save my time in searching for some in our deserted stables. Instead of oats I see gold—fine, much gold. That is all, my son. Now I wait to hear your story."

And Jim told of his meeting with Bennett and of the latter's dying commission—but he breathed no syllable of his former life.

"These letters," he concluded, "are supposed to give me the address of the woman to whom this gold dust belongs. So you see how important it is that I should have them."

The padre shook his head. "Letters, my son, I know nothing of, nor the chest of this Bennett. Everything, as you see, is changed since two years are past, and Padre Antonio, when he forsake the Mission, look over all things and tear all paper and letters. So I think it would be foolish to expect I will find some."

Jim groaned aloud alike with disappointment and bodily pain. "I'll get up and look myself," he commenced, attempting to throw off his coverings.

"Nay, nay, my son, that I will not permit. Your business is to lie still and so lose the fever-ague. Now, I will make with you what you call a bargain, is it not? I will look for these English papers in all rooms and houses if you promise to take much of my pottage."

Soon the steaming wholesome mess was before the stricken man, and he did his best to partake of it, though he had no appetite and was racked with pain.

"Sleep, sleep, my son, and have much patience. I

say for you six Ave Marias and six Pater-nosters. All will be well, I doubt not."

Hour after hour passed wearily away. Somehow Jim had come to regard these letters, whose very existence was so improbable, as a sort of vade mecum. They would inform him upon every point he desired information. There would be something in them not only about Randall and Boles, but also about the Marquis, for did not Randall live at the South Lodge of Pierton Abbey? They would have some mention, too, of Ronaldson-Ronaldson, who must return with Jim and live the true, the only beautiful and worthy life. But Tom might refuse to come, he might even be married, or worse still—he might be dead. So day waxed and waned in the cell-like room, the fever meanwhile gaining upon its victim. What could the padre be doing? At length, just before the Angelus, the priest entered bringing more pozzoli, otherwise his hands were empty.

"Have you found them?" said Jim, querulously,

as he put himself in a sitting posture.

"No, my dear son," returned the dévote, regretfully. "No, I have searched much, but I still search moremore rooms I have yet. Courage, courage," he continued, as Jim fell back with a groan of mingled pain and irritation.

"No, I cannot, I will not eat till I have the letters!" The padre looked at the pain-racked being before him, wondering greatly at his anxiety to send off this gold, which other men would surely be glad of an excuse to keep. Sadly he left the room. He knew Jim could not expect to recover if he did not take the light nourishment he so greatly needed, yet to remonstrate would be hurtful as well as futile.

In a few minutes the good creature returned bearing a freshly-trimmed lamp, which he placed on the settle together with some folded, tattered newspapers.

"No letters, my son, but these are without doubt the journals of England. They may, perhaps, give you some interest while I go to pray to our Blessed Lady for you. It is the Vesper hour. I may delay no more."

Jim pushed the printed papers from him with something like anger and disgust; but in doing so his eye fell on the word "Hurstwick." In a moment he drew them nearer. They must have been sent to Bennett by his sister. For who on this, the other side of the world and in the old Mission of San Carlos, could have the slightest interest in such ultra-provincial English news as The Hurstwick Advertiser purveyed?

CHAPTER VI.

It knows not wrath nor pardon; utter true
Its measures mete, its faultiess balance weighs; Times are as nought, to-morrow it will judge Or after many days.

"THE LIGHT OF ASIA."

WITH feverish, trembling fingers Jim unfolded the soiled, small-typed gazette which the English duty on paper fettered in size and heightened in price.

There were two copies which, through damp and long-folding, had lost their tenuity and in places were barely decipherable. The first he examined bore date February 27, 1838.

What might he expect to find? Ah, here is something in blacker type headed "The Feringham Wood Mystery." With beating heart and throbbing temples he read:

We are thankful to be able to report the convalencence of Fred Randall, the young keeper whose life was so seriously endangered in the desperate encounter with unknown poachers in Feringham Wood last November. His conduct on that occasion (as our readers will remember) was characterised by Boles, the head keeper, as suspiciously like connivance with the blackguards, and unforas suspiciously like connivance with the blackguards, and unfortunately the young fellow can offer no explanation of a satisfactory nature. This is to be regreted both in the interests of Randall and justice, but when the former says he has "clean forgot everything," the latter is too heavily handicapped to take action.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, according to the several standpoints of onlookers, medical evidence goes to support the young man's assertion, and if he has "clean forgot everything," there seems scant probability of the Feringham Wood mystery ever being cleared up. Meanwhile, the police have only the meagre

description of the Bennett brothers furnished by Boles, and this has been forwarded both to Melbourne and Sydney, for the suspects

are supposed to have sailed to one or other port.

Able-bodied sailors they are, and were spending a few days' leave Also-bodied sailors they are, and were spending a few days' leave of absence with their respected uncle, the schoolmaster at Sheringham, early in November last. At present the only shred of evidence against them is that proffered by Boles—namely, that the poachers had bright chestnut hair of the same shade as Miss Sarah Bennett's, who resides with her uncle at Sheringham, and whom, we understand, the young keeper has "kept company" with for some months past. Truly, this is a case in which justice may be said to depend upon if not "from" a hair.

"Poor fellows!" was Jim's first exclamation. "To think the Bennetts should have suffered for my crime! That's why they took to the Boston trade and Jacob got drowned. Dear, dear! Well, I'll get Isaac's gold to the sister as soon as possible if only to show my gratitude.

All at once he commenced to laugh immoderately, for the idea that the wigs he and Ronaldson had worn should have resembled Sarah Bennett's hair and so have involved her brothers in an affair with which they had not the slightest connection, was forced by his disordered imagination into an undue grotesqueness and importance.

Gradually he became calmer, and though but partially realising that he was now free from all stain of bloodguiltiness, his thoughts turned towards the Marquis. Taking a key from a string depending from his neck he unlocked the box Larkin had sent, and for the first time since he packed it nine years before, opened the case containing his father's miniature. Long and intently he gazed upon it, but instead of the smiling, handsome, aristocratic features there depicted, he beheld a countenance upon which premature age, indulged grief, and self-absorption had drawn indelible lines, accentuated by harshness and contempt. For such was the face of the Marquis when Jim last looked upon it in the flesh, and such the portrait memory pronounced true and life-like. Could the owner of such a face forget and forgive ? As if in answer to the unspoken question the words, "Herewith I solemnly disown and disinherit you," rang through the cell-like room, a very death-knell to hope. Shudderingly Jim closed the case. Was he not a fool to imagine for one moment that his father would meet the advances he, Jim, was prepared to make? Yet the repudiatory letter should be written as soon as ever the padre returned and would give him a pen. For had he not covenanted with himself so to write when away on the mountains? Throwing himself back on the hard pillow he closed his eyes for a moment, and in fancy saw a flock of wild sheep leap a precipice in the moonlight. But he was too restless for quiet thought, and when his feverish fingers touched the other copy of The Hurstwick Advertiser, the desire to know what it might contain brought him again to a sitting posture.

It bore date June 30, 1838, and squeezed in at the foot of a column Jim read with a sudden sinking of the heart:

We understand that the Randalls, who have been lodge-keepers at Pierton Abbey for nearly thirty years, will be leaving shortly for New Zealand under the auspices of the New Zealand Land Company. This association, which numbers among its members such influential personages as Mr. Edward Gibbon Wakefield, Mr. Francis Baring, Lord Durham, Mr. Woolrych, and others, has for its object the settlement of persons of small capital and industrious habits in the new colony, the climate and soil of which are described as perfect. The Randalls will carry with them the good wishes of all Hustwick people, whose sympathies were entirely theirs during the cloud which rested, for a time, on their good name after the still unexplained Feringham Wood affray.

Their son Frederick is, so we understand, to be married shortly

to Miss Sarah Bennett, who, until the decease of her uncle and aunt last April, resided at Sheringham. It is to be hoped that a voyage to the Antipodes may not only restore the young man's health but his memory, for Hurstwick people would dearly love to have that mystery with which he was connected explained.

Jim groaned. How the poor fellow must have suffered from these annoying remarks! And now it was quite evident that all idea of finding Sarah Bennett, either at Hurstwick or Sheringham, must be given up. Then the problem as to how the gold was to be sent to her worried Jim's over-taxed brain and unstrung nerves, clamouring for solution.

Turning the tattered newspaper aimlessly over and over as he revolved this extremely simple question (for when he wrote to Hurstwick would it not be an easy matter to learn the address of the Randalls?), a paragraph in bolder type caught his eye. Holding the worn sheet closer to the lamp, for he could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses, he read:

Yesterday, in the presence of the Marquis of Pierhampton, the Earl of Towermains and Lord Arthur Warner, a tablet of white marble to the memory of the lamented young nobleman, Lord James Bagahot Warner, whose untimely death we chronicled last December, was unveiled. It is on the north wall of the Pierton Chapel, in St. Mary's, immediately above the magnificent tomb of the late Marchioness. The inscription in gold letters runs, "Sacred to the memory of Lord James Bagshot Warner, third son of John tenth Marquis of Pierhampton, and Alicia his wife, who met death by the foundering of The Sultan in mid ocean about November the 30th, 1837. Ætat XIX. "And the see gave up its dead."

"Monstrous! Shameful!" cried Jim, as he tossed off the healing blankets and sprang from the palletbed. He felt himself stifling, and with that insensibility to physical pain often lent for a brief period by strong excitement, he paced the little room, his utterance thick and rapid.

The position was perfectly clear to him, and with that

readiness to understand and grapple with a novel situation so characteristic of a fever-weakened, over-wrought brain, he at once proceeded to portray the express object for which he had been killed off in this beneath-sea and above-board fashion.

"So, I'm at the bottom of the ocean? Ha! ha! A clever dodge, Mr. Marquis! I see your game! This ship—the what-you-may-call-it?—goes down. All hands lost, none left to tell the tale. Splendid opp'rtunity to get rid of wicked son and stop his returning! James James, what a joke it is! I'm dead, you know! Ha! ha! And what's more, publicly buried with a verse of Scripture for my shroud! Ha! ha! ha! ha! Ha!"

And the speaker's voice gained in strength as delirium took the throne from which swaying reason had fallen. Then sinking his voice to view with apparent calmness a pitfall he had but narrowly escaped, he continued:

"What a fool I should have made of myself if I hadn't seen that paper! I—the dead man—should have gone back to Hurstwick. Ha! ha! ha!

"I, the dead man," he re-commenced, as he stumbled over the uneven floor, "I, the—dead—man—should have—should——" Suddenly, he came to a stand and, violently striking his forehead with his hand, a cry deep, pitiful, and piercing as that of a heart-broken child who realises in one brief, vivid moment he has been abandoned to certain destruction, a cry that must have startled the angels about the throne, rang out upon the air—"My oath! My oath! Ah, God!"

And his excitement having spent itself, and its spurious strength, Jim fell heavily upon the bed, and in so doing overturned the lamp but newly-filled with oil.

The padre, who since Vespers had renewed his search for the letters, re-entered the cell a minute later and found the bed in flames.

With super-human strength he dragged the insensible Jim from it, leaving him upon the floor. Then, having no water at hand, he flung the sacks of gold one upon the other on the burning mass. The under sack was quickly consumed and its contents strewed the ground, but what might have proved a terrible conflagration was averted.

That night the padre found it necessary to shave Jim's head.

That night, too, Mr. Larkin was taken prisoner by the Californians; and four days after Jim's arrival at the Mission of San Carlos, the owner appeared and took possession of every stick and stone on the premises.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

Love is enough; while ye deemed him a-sleeping
There were signs of his coming and sounds of his feet:
His touch it was that would bring you to weeping,
When summer was deepest and music most sweet;
In his footsteps ye followed the day to its dying,
Ye went forth by his gown-skirts the morning to meet,
In his place in the beaten-down orchard grass lying
Of the sweet ways ye pondered yet left for life's trying.

—WILLIAM MORRIS.

1868.

"MINE has been a dog's life, neither more nor less!" remarked Mary Barnard, as with unconscious art she grouped dark, crimson roses and graceful sprays of white jessamine in an old-fashioned broad, flat, Crown-Derby vase. Voice and manner were wholly devoid of passion, her words evidently but a sudden crystallization of thoughts long held in solution.

Though to the casual observer there was nothing dog-like in the woman's appearance save, perhaps, the thick, wavy, silky brown hair which framed a face singularly girlish for its forty-two years, yet withal refined, as youth unaided never refines, the comparison seemed to please her and be worth following up.

"Yes, there's no doubt about it, a dog's life! I believe my nature must be three-parts dog, which is, perhaps, a condition not wholly contemptible. One can be too faithful, though, too loving. I'm sure of it, though it seems downright heresy to say so. Why," and here the speaker crossed to the low mantel for the companion vase, "I've never all these years, until just lately—well, perhaps for the past six or seven years—questioned Martha's right to mould my life and all connected with it: I've given her the hearty, ave, the blind affection of the dog. Like a dog, too, I have found her at times incomprehensible, yet I've always excused her to myself and everybody else. She's wonderful, too—such sense, such brightness, aye, and such spirit. I'm nowhere compared with her. No wonder she has no patience with me at times; we are so different, she so intensely practical, I-well, I love differently and think differently—I suppose because I see things differently. My real, best pleasures are mere dust and ashes in her sight. Yet Martin "and here the voice was unconsciously lowered-" has thoughts like mine, and so I'll keep my thoughts."

Placing the now filled vases on the muslin-draped dressing-table of the low-ceiled bedroom, Mary Barnard paused for a moment before the broad, latticed rose-clad window.

Of that outlook she never tired, for though its salient features were ever the same, her wonderful intuition for the beautiful enabled her to apprehend (even after the lapse of a short half-hour) some fresh object for admiration, some delightful, if trifling, change in the scene around her.

To pause for a moment now and again in the midst of her domestic duties, and gaze up or down the lovely Derwent Valley, high above which she and her sister dwelt, was to Mary Barnard a joy akin to that with which a true, yet immature artist watches the working of some immortal painter.

"So full of fancies is Mary!" was a frequent saying of Martha, and though the sisters loved each other truly,

their spirits dwelt far apart.

The elder, by right of her eighteen years' seniority combined with an uncommon personality and indomitable will, had always seized upon, or acquired without effort, a foremost position in the regard of every one with whom she came in contact, and permitted no one, not even her sister, to share that position.

If persons manifested a decided preference for Mary, Martha would either inoculate Mary with a distaste for them, or make things too unpleasant for the friendship to be continued.

And Mary, who from her earliest childhood had loved her sister with that devotion which is only possible when allied to a blind faith in its object, had sacrificed more than one friendship on the altar of Martha's egotism. To be first in the thoughts and consideration of everyone, this, Martha argued, was but her due, and if anyone should be willing and ready to give her her due, that one was certainly Mary, who owed everything, save actual existence, to her.

But of late years it had been impossible for Martha to make Mary see persons and things from her own special point of view, and consequently there were, at times, unpleasant scenes between the sisters. For as Martha grew older, she was now just sixty, she held more tenaciously than ever to what she called "the respect due to her," but which Mary could not but regard as an unlovely craving for admiration and attention.

So when Martin Davenant—a wonderful carver in wood from Picardie, who twelve years ago had established himself and his little grand-niece Joanna, with an old French housekeeper, some three or four miles distant from Heather's Edge—not only regarded Mary with favour, but actually refused to act upon the advice Martha offered as to the bringing-up of the little Joanna, the intimacy with him, though not actually broken off, was sensibly impaired.

As Mary looked forth this August morning the moors were a sea of crimson-shaded waves, upon which expectant sportsmen were preparing to embark, for next Wednesday was "the twelfth" and visitors were coming to the sisters at latest on Tuesday. The Misses Barnard did not receive boarders, as did several of their equally isolated neighbours during the shooting season.

But Mr. Tom Ronaldson, the wealthy Hurstwick banker, though ostensibly coming to join Lord Clanfalkland's party on the moors, had requested the Misses Barnard to receive him in order that he might introduce himself to, and make friends with, a young man, none other than his nephew—whom, though the Barnards had known from babyhood, he had never yet set eyes upon.

For Jack Ronaldson, as the young man was called, was a native of Friston-Boughton, having been born at Heather's Edge nearly twenty years ago, in the very bedroom Mary is now preparing. As she recalled that never-to-be-forgotten event while deftly encasing a couple of downy pillows in slips of fine, lavender-scented linen, the door opened and Martha entered.

She was an exceedingly handsome woman for her sixty years, her perfectly white, wavy hair and deep-black

eyes and brows giving her at all times a grand air of distinction. Throwing a contemptuous glance at the flowers Mary had arranged, she seated herself on the couch at the foot of the bed, and, with a beckoning movement, said in her quick imperious manner, "Come here, my dear; I want to speak to you while I have the opportunity. You know Jack comes with Mr. Ronaldson, don't you?"

Of course, Mary knew, for was she not even now preparing his bedchamber? Long experience, too, had made the younger Miss Barnard somewhat suspicious of the Socratic method as practised by Martha, for it was a favourite modus operandi with the latter to inveigle her sister into making admissions, and then saddle her with the deductions she herself drew therefrom.

"Well, you know, don't you, that Jack will be twenty next November?" and again the questioner waited.

"Why, sister, of course I know that; I was only thinking of it when you came in."

"Never mind what you were thinking of, dear, but listen. At twenty young men are apt to fall in love, aren't they?"

Mary smiled. "I'm afraid I don't know much about young men at that age," she said.

"Perhaps not; they didn't trouble you a great deal, did they?" questioned the elder, drily.

To this remark, which Mary could never have made to any one, she vouchsafed no reply, but that she felt it was manifest by the colour which flushed her brow as she rose from the couch with the object of resuming her work.

"There's nothing to be vexed about," continued

Martha, with a slight laugh, as she pulled her sister to her own level again. "It's not about you, but about Jack I want to speak. You know he is mother-less, don't you?"

"I wish, Martha, you would not trouble me with these endless, unnecessary questions," retorted Mary, now justly annoyed. "Say what you want to say and let me finish the bed!"

"There's no need to get angry, and by this time you ought to be well aware that when I speak I speak with a purpose. If you choose to use the common-sense, which, as a Barnard, you must have somewhere about you—though I'm free to confess it is rarely on show—you would have seen what I was driving at. But I'll be more explicit. Jack's motherless, that we are agreed upon; well, then, it behoves us to act a mother's part by him. Do you comprehend me?"

Mary, now at the bed-making again, was silent. She did not approve of Martha's didactic-satirical style, though she was too well accustomed to it not to be fully aware that to object to or expose it as disagreeable and unsisterly would be a useless expenditure of breath.

"There's no good in being sulky," continued Martha, in dangerously equable tones. "You understand, I may venture to suppose, that Mr. Ronaldson's object in coming here next week is to make things right with Jack and decide on his future?"

"We shall miss him very much if he leaves us altogether," observed Mary, as, her bed-making finished, she stood gazing out at the moor.

"Don't be a fool, child," was the elder woman's unceremonious retort. "Jack has been away nearly six years—it's sheer nonsense to talk about missing

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him. We must just make up our minds that he has to go, and the wisest thing we can do is to encourage him to be friendly with Mr. Ronaldson."

Mary made no reply to this suggestion, for if any one had made a point of arousing Jack's ill-feeling against the banker it had been Martha. Miss Barnard, somewhat nettled by her sister's silence, proceeded to offer a remark which seemed almost an apology for what was evidently in Mary's mind.

"Now that after all these years Mr. Ronaldson is going to do the right thing by the lad (at least I should hope so), and give him his proper place in society, it will be our duty to see he forms no connections—makes no friends, I mean, that the banker would disapprove of. You agree with me, eh?"

"I wish, Martha, you wouldn't ask me these questions. You know how dearly I love Jack, and that I would do anything and everything in my power to further his happiness," said Mary, almost plaintively.

Experience told her that Martha was keeping something back. Moreover, that same experience warned her that she was being egged on to a duel of high words and sharp sayings in which, as usual, she would be wounded, as well as worsted.

"I'm sorry I brought up these matters if they make you angry, sister," was Martha's suspiciously calm deliverance. "But if you have, as you say, and, as I do not, mind you, for one moment deny, this great affection for the young fellow, you will support me in the suggestion I am about to make for his benefit!"

And the speaker paused for an assurance from her listener. But Mary was shy; she was not to be caught.

"What is it you want me to do, sister?" she asked, wearily.

"Do!—do!" retorted Martha, rising to her feet, her long-smouldering wrath at Mary's unpliability breaking into flame and scorching its object in its fury. "Do! You want to know what I wish you to do. P'U tell you, and mind you do it! D'ye hear? Keep your dirty little Joanna away from Jack! I'll not have her here, and if you ever dare to ask or bring her, I'll put her outside the house myself, if I have to take a pair of tongs to do it! Ah, you may well get out of my way!"

For with hands to her ears Mary fled before her sister's diabolic look and scathing words.

"As for your affection for that chit—bah! it's about as real as mine!" continued the strident voice now at the stair-head. "If you're not the talk of the whole dale it's not your fault. I hate a woman that doesn't know her own value, but must be for ever hankering after a man, and such a man!"

And the speaker ground her teeth in impotent rage as she walked away to her own room, to be heartily ashamed of herself an hour later.

But Martha Barnard's soul had no experience of the benefits that "open confession" is said to bestow, and if she repented of these exhibitions of spite and jealousy none but herself knew.

Mary, trembling from head to foot, more from the terrible insinuations (which pierced like sharp knives the bosom where she had fondly conceived her most cherished thoughts were securely hidden) than from the exhibition of fury, found refuge in the garden. Had she not had more than one experience of such a scene she might justly have feared that her sister had taken leave of her senses.

In days gone by Mary had attributed such ebullitions

to sudden attacks of illness or indigestion; now she could not fail to see they sprang from wounded pride or jealousy.

"Poor little chap! How heart-broken he was when he left us, and how delighted he is at the thought of coming back! But he'll be too big now for Martha to bully. If only I were different, I suppose she wouldn't dare to bully me."

And Mary sighed. It was the evening after the storm and she was wending her way to the churchyard of Friston-Boughton, four miles distant from Heather's Edge. In her hands she carried a basket of green moss and white roses destined for a grave, at the head of which stood an unpretentious stone with the inscription:

Sacred to the memory of Eleanor Gavin Jones, née Ronaldson; formerly of Hurstwick, who died November 10th, 1848, aged 27 years.

For years the lady's last resting-place had been unmarked, save by the flowers or evergreens which, summer or winter, if the roads were passable, Mary never failed each Saturday to bring.

But about ten months or so ago Mr. Tom Ronaldson, as was supposed, had given orders for the erection of this headstone as it stood. Mary did not like the inscription; it read, she thought, like an insult to the dead. For the lady, Jack's mother, when she came to Heather's Edge Cottage for those few, brief hours when death followed so quickly on the boy's birth, had never mentioned the name of Jones or given the least idea to the sisters that that was her husband's name.

Martha, indeed, had always regarded the banker himself as the lady's husband and Jack's father, and though Mary could never make up her mind that Martha was right in that conclusion, she could not but own that all the circumstances connected with Jack's birth were exceedingly mysterious.

"Appearances are dead against him," Martha remarked, the first and only time she had seen the banker. "A man who sets himself to wear his hair like our Blessed Lord and the holy apostles is either a great hypocrite or a great sinner, and it's my belief Mr. Ronaldson is both one and the other. His hair hangs long, and thereby hangs a tale, as Shakespeare says. You mark my words!"

And when after a lapse of eighteen years the stone was placed at the head of the mother's grave, Martha merely remarked when she heard of it, "It's a wonder to me the poor thing doesn't rise up and confound it. To have stories piled on top of you like that is enough to make you lose all patience with the resurrection morn!"

But, mystery or no mystery, from the first appearance of the baby, the banker or his agent had regularly forwarded each quarter a handsome cheque for its support—an allowance which had been forwarded with equal regularity during the whole of the time the boy had been in Switzerland. When Miss Barnard protested against receiving money for no outlay—Martha's métier was to be considered independent to the core of her being—she was informed that Mr. Ronaldson would be obliged by the sisters permitting Jack to regard Heather's Edge as his home until other arrangements could be made for him.

And now Jack was really returning. As Mary stooped over the grave of the mother he had never seen, she wondered, for the thousandth time, if he were greatly

changed in appearance. He would certainly be very angry when he saw this head-stone.

And would he be falling in love as Martha had suggested? Well, there could be nothing wrong in that, and who could make him a sweeter or more lovely wife than Jo.? Joanna was so clever, so charming! It was really foolish, so Mary reasoned, for Martha to suppose that Jack and Joanna could be kept apart. If Jo. could not come to Heather's Edge, Jack would be sure to go to the Gap, for Davenant was Jack's hero. Besides, Jack and Jo. were school-mates in childhood, for when arrangements were made with Mr. Cartwright, the bachelor rector, to educate the lad, that gentleman asked Davenant to let Jo., who was prime favourite with him, take lessons at the rectory too. And Jack always sent Jo. messages in his letters to Mary.

Of course Mr. Ronaldson might take Jack away altogether, as Martha said, but if Martha chose (yes, that was the pivot on which so much, so very much, depended), if Martha chose, she might introduce Jo. to the banker and then he would see for himself what a charming girl she was, quite fitted for any society, though, of course, she had very little, if any, money.

The worst of the matter was that Martha might put all sorts of wrong notions into Mr. Ronaldson's head about her, and then there would be unpleasantness. Mary was for leaving things for Providence to arrange. Providence, without the slightest warning, had sent Jack to be born at Heather's Edge. Why, then, should Martha trouble herself or anyone else as to whom Jack should or should not fall in love with? Did not God breathe upon the land in the springtime, and wheresoever His breath penetrated

the soil all sorts of lovely coloured things sprang up to sweeten the air and gladden the heart?

And, surely, it was the same with the heart's springtime. In God's good pleasure He would breathe upon these young hearts, and, if such was His design flowers of love and trust for and in each other would blossom as by magic. If He had other plans for them, then they would meet and part merely as ordinary acquaintances. So to Mary it seemed best to leave a matter of such immense importance in Higher hands.

But Martha had quite other ideas of Providence, and would have laughed to scorn the Hebrew's poet song of the wonders accomplished by God's Voice. Providence in her eyes was less of a Divinity than a stage manager under whom she held no lower post than the important one of local leading-lady.

After the scene of the morning in which Joanna had been so shamefully vilified, Mary decided she would not see her, though she knew by the organ strains now floating through the open church door and the lozenge-shaped windows that the girl was rehearsing for the morrow's services. So resolved, Mary hurried across the paved pathway of the churchyard only to be confronted at the lych-gate by Martin Davenant.

"Good evening, Miss Mary," said the carver, a spare man of about fifty, with a somewhat dreamy and unmistakably foreign cast of countenance. "I've been to the other side of Axmoor Edge to look at some oak I'm growing, and on my way back thought I would call in for Jo., it's about her time, I think. Do you know if she is ready?"

Long residence in England had made the carver a fluent speaker of English, though he usually employed his native tongue when talking to Jo. "I haven't been into the church to-night, Mr. Davenant, for I'm anxious to get home," replied Mary, somewhat confused by her disingenuousness." We're expecting visitors next Tuesday, or may be earlier."

"Ah, yes, Master Jack sent me a line last week telling me I might expect to see him before our harvest-moon is grey-headed. He writes a capital French letter. And I have heard from a Mr. Ronaldson, of Hurstwick—a relative of Jack's, is he not? He tells us he is coming into this neighbourhood shortly to meet him, and will call and see me. He wants me to undertake rather a big thing for a new house he is going to," continued the carver, evidently desirous of making the most of this unusual opportunity of converse with Mary. "It is to divide a great hall—a four-fold oak screen, the panels to be in high relief."

"That means a lot of work, doesn't it?" said Mary, whose very anxiety to cut the conversation short and be gone made her prolong it. "Does he ask for anything special, or merely conventional treatment?"

"He has a fancy, he says, for something illustrative of the history or legends of these parts. I've looked out one or two scenes that I think will show up well; the figures will have to be nearly life-size. I wish, Miss Mary," continued Davenant, with unmistakable sincerity in his tones, "that you would come up and look at some rough sketches Jo. and I have made for three of the panels. Jo. is a great help, but I always prize the opinion of an outsider, and, you know I do not flatter, yours more than any other."

As Mary turned nervously away from the Frenchman's raised hat, bracing herself to give him some

careless refusal and go on her way, for surely some of the villagers would have seen the two talking together, to her great relief she saw Joanna approaching.

"Oh, here's Jo.," she cried, her soul unconsciously gladdened by the picture the girl helped to make. The blue of her soft cambric gown and cross-over against the luxuriant green of the churchyard grass, the red-gold of her abundant hair, deepened in the sunset glow, made a delightful combination of contrast and harmony.

The graceful poise and sway of the body as, on perceiving the two at the gate, the girl hurried forward were eclipsed when she joined them by the splendour of her eyes, which were blue as her gown, blue as the sky above, as the harebells that but now were gemming the hedgerows and moorland paths.

"Oh, Mary, you were not going without speaking to me," she cried in reproachful tones, as her gaze fell on the emptied basket.

"I was indeed, child," returned the other, her former nervousness now quenched in the light of loving admiration which illumined her gentle countenance. "We're expecting visitors, you know, and that means work."

"But you don't call Jack a visitor, surely, and as for this uncle, I should think the maid and Miss Martha—pardonne, I should have said Miss Martha and the maid—are capable of preparing for him without your aid. Besides your visitors are not coming for days yet. No, no, not another word, but back to the Gap you go with us, and we'll take you home along the Ridge after supper. We both want you, don't we, Dads?"

Martin, leaning against the gate, was startled by

the girl's abrupt question from his contemplation of Mary's face, a face whose refinement had always greatly attracted him.

"I was asking Miss Mary to come and look at our sketches for Mr. Ronaldson's screen as you came up," he said.

"Yes, and Dads thinks a lot of your opinion, Mary, you know. I've been trying my pencil on 'Miss Mellet,' if you please, Pain Peveril's warlike daughter," and the girl mouthed the last few words to signify that that individual was a person of immense importance. "Our new maid," she continued, "will make a splendid model for ——. Oh, but I must tell you a joke about her." And the speaker broke off suddenly to say, "You go on, Dads, I want to tell Mary something privately."

And with a delightful air of secrecy she drew her friend through the gateway. But Mary, mindful of that terrible scene in the morning and desirous above all things that her sister's wrath should have no opportunity of expending itself on the head of the innocent Jo., gently disengaged herself, saying:

"Not now, dear, another time. I really cannot stay

any longer."

"Another time?" echoed the girl. "But when? Say when and I'll be content. You never come near the Gap, and you can't think how badly I want you sometimes. Mr. Cartwright dead, you always too busy to come, and Miss Martha hating me and all my works. Oh! you needn't try to deny it, Mary. But I've an idea in my head—a lovely idea," she continued with a sudden return to her former vivacity. "I shan't tell you now, but you'll know some day."

And the look which accompanied the words was

brimful of mystery and significance wholly inexplicable to Mary.

Good-byes were said, but before her friend had taken

many steps Joanna was at her side again.

"Mary," she cried, "don't on any account tell Jack that I play the organ now. I want to surprise him."

"I don't suppose you'll see him before Sunday, dear. I know Mr. Ronaldson means to take him grouse-driving."

"If he doesn't want to come he can stop away,

voilà! Au revoir, ma chérie."

And the girl flew back to her uncle while Mary puzzled herself all the way home about that lovely idea. What could it be?

CHAPTER II.

All was bright, but Thou camest so dreadful and brief, Like a thunderbolt falling in gardens of flowers.

Ir was perhaps scarcely surprising that when Miss Barnard first made the acquaintance of Mr. Tom Ronaldson she should have conceived a suspicion of his genuineness of which she was never wholly disabused.

It was on the 11th of November, 1848, that she saw him for the first time, and his personal appearance, together with the circumstances which attended his coming to Heather's Edge, certainly gave colour to her suspicions.

Martha Barnard was then hourly expecting the husband of a young and extremely handsome lady, who scarcely more than three days before had begged shelter at the cottage, the post-boy who had brought her so far refusing to go further, the snow having (so he said) rendered the moor impassable.

To add to the peculiarity of the situation, this lady gave birth to a boy twenty-four hours after her arrival, and died six hours later.

These events following with such rapidity upon each other greatly distressed the inmates of Heather's Edge Cottage. But nothing shocked the elder Miss Barnard so much as what she called the repudiation by the banker of the relationship the lady had assigned to him. She was always extremely thankful that she had

insisted upon the stranger writing at once to her husband; the note, as she took care to see, being handed to the postboy for immediate despatch, his return to Sheafland involving no danger either to himself or horses.

It was at ten o'clock on the morning after these tragic events that Miss Barnard's little maid-servant, having opened the front door in response to a knock, handed her mistress a card with the information that a queer-looking gentleman wanted to see "Miss Ronaldson."

"Miss Ronaldson, indeed!" she exclaimed, "that won't do for me," and hurrying to the door she found a man (apparently about thirty years of age) with thick raven hair hanging in wavy curls below his shoulders. As he approached with cheerfulness to greet her she said with great solemnity:

"I deeply regret to have to inform you, sir, that your wife died last night after giving birth to a boy."

The peculiar looking individual fell back as though to avert a blow, but quickly recovering himself, said in explanatory tones:

"My wife? There must be some mistake, my dear madam. My name is Ronaldson, and from a note I received early yesterday morning, I was led to expect I should find Miss Ronaldson, my sister, here. The weather has changed, and I have, as you see, good horses ready to conduct us home."

"Then is there another Mr. Ronaldson living at Hurstwick? And are you the banker there?"

"There is no other Mr. Ronaldson living at Hurst wick that I am aware of," returned Tom. "My father died three years ago, and we have no near relatives either in Hurstwick or elsewhere. I am

the head of the banking firm of Ronaldson and Ronaldson there."

But even as Tom spoke his heart sank low with apprehension of coming evil, this woman regarded him so fixedly. And why did she not call Eleanor?

"Well, it is, I grieve to say, Mrs., not Miss, Ronaldson who lies dead in this house, sir, and I trust you will think seriously before you venture to repudiate the solemn responsibility she, without a doubt, assigned to you—a responsibility which affects both the living and the dead. But you shall see her remains, then you will be under no delusion as to her identity."

Up the narrow, winding stairs Tom, stifled by conflicting emotions, followed his evidently displeased conductress to a comfortably furnished bedroom, the very atmosphere of which announced Death's presence.

At sight of the beautiful, but lifeless, features of his only, and fondly-cherished sister, Tom could restrain himself no longer, and, sinking down by the bedside, sobbed aloud.

As Martha watched his utter abandonment to grief, as she heard his agonised repetition of "Eleanor, my Eleanor!" she believed she saw before her a conscience-stricken husband; and her own regret at the untimely death of the beautiful young stranger was largely tempered by the satisfaction she derived at finding her theory of relationship supported by such unmistakeable evidence.

Quietly withdrawing to the keeping-room below she shook her head in wise, sad fashion.

"He's a bad lot, Mary, I fear; a very bad lot."
And as Mary with red eyes questioned the statement.

Martha continued. "What tale do you think he wanted to stuff me with? That he was that poor dear's brother; brother / do you hear?"

"But," said Mary, "he may have meant brother-

in-law, perhaps."

"Dear! that's just like you, always trying to put me right. Do you think, child, that I didn't at once ask him if he had any brothers, and whether he was the Hurstwick banker? Of course I did, and he has no relations there, nor anywhere else, he says. You know as well as I do that that poor dear said her name was Ronaldson—now you do know that?"

"Yes, I certainly understood her to say so," returned Mary, with something like reluctance. She was then twenty-two, and unwilling to think badly of her fellows. "Yet why should he wish to call her his sister if she was his wife?" she asked, her thoughts

taking voice.

"Ah! you may well ask that; for it's not likely such a child as you should know the ways of men. But I've heard my dear mother say that they'll stick at nothing to compass their own ends. Why, it's my belief he's got a wife down at this Hurstwick place, and won't own up to this, who, I haven't a shadow of a doubt, is his true and lawful one."

"Oh, sister, that would be too dreadful," exclaimed Mary, shocked at such a supposition; "don't

let us think so badly of him as that."

"Ah! you always take an opposite view of things," returned Martha, tartly. "I'm seldom wrong, and I'm sure I'm right now. Anyway, I desire you keep your thoughts about the matter to yourself when he comes down. You must come into the parlour with me then, but you'd best not speak unless you're

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spoken to. Perhaps when you've seen the strange-looking creature you won't think quite so well of him."

For the next two hours there was no sound from the death-chamber, for after that first, irrepressible outburst of grief a great calm fell upon the banker. Sweeping aside for the moment his deep, personal sorrow, he bent every faculty of his mind to solve the problem of his sister's presence in this out-of-theworld spot—a wife, a mother. Nor was the absence of the husband the only remarkable part of the mystery, her very silence respecting him, whose place was surely by her side at this moment, was more significant even than his absence. Tom had not seen her for two years, for in 1846 it had been arranged that she should visit her friends, the Mountjoys, in Dublin and afterwards accompany them on a lengthened continental tour. Tom, at the same time, took ship for New Zealand, mainly with the object of looking after the Randalls, who left Hurstwick the year following "The Feringham Wood Affray." For since nine years had elapsed, and no word had been received from "Lord Jim," Tom could no longer refuse to believe the report of his death that reached Hurstwick the month after the young nobleman's departure therefrom. He was, therefore, the more anxious to redeem his promise respecting Fred Randall. The limit of absence was fixed at two years; and as the movements of brother and sister would necessarily be liable to alteration, it had been agreed between them that all news respecting either should be transmitted to Mr. Brotherton, the bank manager, who would then forward such information, when possible, to the proper quarters. When Ronaldson reached Port Arthur, Tasmania, the captain of his vessel

refused to go on to New Zealand, for the native war was then at its height, and massacres of white men by Maoris not infrequent. Tom was greatly annoved at this decision, but recognising it would be a foolhardy act to seek for the Randalls at such a juncture resolved to stick to the ship, which at once proceeded to the eastern coast of China. The return voyage was made via Ceylon and the Cape of Good Hope. Eventually Ronaldson landed at Marseilles, as he had business to transact in Paris, then in a state of revolution of which he was unaware until his vessel had again left port.

By this same vessel he had forwarded a letter for Brotherton, informing him that he should be in Hurstwick and ready to attend to business at latest by the 6th of November. But it was close upon midnight of the 9th when he drove up to his house, Eleanor's note being immediately handed to him, together with a telegram, also from her, which he was informed had been waiting for him since the previous day. The latter despatched from Liverpool and bearing date November 7th, ran:

Meet me at Brickington Hotel at noon on the 10th.—ELBANOR.

The letter Tom now drew from his pocket, and reperused in the hope of extracting something of an elucidatory nature. It promised much information of importance, but gave absolutely none.

DEAREST TOM,—I find it will be impossible for me to reach. Brickington by noon to-morrow, so please come on here directly you receive this. The postboy is afraid to cross the moor because a little snow has fallen, and I don't urge the matter, for he is a careless driver and nearly had me out on the road half-an-hour ago. It is such a comfort to know you are in England. I'm longing to see you, and I've a lovely surprise for you. Don't fail to come at once.

—As always, Your loving ELEANOR.

Noting for

No time for more.

The address was appended by another hand.



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As the bereaved brother sat now by the side of the lifeless writer, he could not but deeply feel the cruelty of circumstance, which had robbed him, not only of his dearly loved sister, but of the opportunity of learning from her own lips the nature of "the pleasant surprise" she had had in store for him. The "surprises" he had experienced since entering this cottage were ghastly and solid; the "surprise" Eleanor had promised, though a pleasant one, had vanished for ever.

What could it have been? Surely not the baby child?

The shock of finding things so entirely different to what he had expected was the greater, as from her note he anticipated no evil for her beyond the temporary discomfort consequent upon an enforced lengthening of a troublesome journey. Eleanor was evidently well, he had concluded, and would be all right with her maid. But where was the maid? He had not known whether his sister would be at home to meet him, or whether she would wait for him to fetch her from Dublin. But the telegram and note had at once settled that question. Brotherton must have told her when he was expected, and she was hastening to meet him when the snow-storm prevented her progress. But the babe, whose wailing now penetrated to his ear from below, who was its father?

And what could have induced Eleanor to give her maiden name to these people or permit them to suppose he was her husband? Perhaps she had not done so, but in the hurry and confusion attending her coming and the arrival of the babe with death in its train they had misunderstood her.

Surely, he at length roused himself to say, surely

all these questions would be satisfactorily answered by the Mountjoys, Eleanor's Dublin friends. They would tell him whom she had met and married without waiting for her brother's approval. Eleanor was not a girl to do anything foolish or wrong. Of course, there was no mystery, and had they not both foreseen the futility of attempting to correspond, some explanatory letter might have reached Tom and put him in possession of all the lacking facts long ago. Even now such letters might be awaiting him at Hurstwick, for just as he was setting off for Friston-Boughton, the caretaker brought him a pile of documents he had bidden her keep till his return, saying, "as they had waited so long, they might wait a few days longer." He wished now he had brought them with him; amongst them he would doubtless have found some solution to the present incomprehensible situation.

But Brotherton would know, he would have heard from Eleanor, of course, and, knowing that Tom was to meet her, would have thought it unnecessary to refer to matters Eleanor would herself prefer to inform her brother of. With an effort Ronaldson shook off something of the depression which crushed him. He would hear at once all that these people could tell him, and, as he stooped and reverently kissed the dear face of the dead, he determined he would neither do nor say anything that could contradict any impression Eleanor had intended to convey to them.

With lips compressed and holding himself well in check, Tom at length descended to the little parlour, in which a bright fire was burning and where the sisters awaited him.

After signifying his desire to be furnished with

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minute particulars of Eleanor's coming and the events following, he listened for some time in complete silence to Miss Barnard's story.

He winced slightly, but did not contradict her as she commenced: "Your wife, sir, came here not quite three days ago, just at dusk and in a blinding snowstorm. She was apparently very well and not much annoyed that the post-boy would not take her further. She was, indeed, very bright, and said if we did not mind giving her food and lodging she would be glad to stay until Mr. Ronaldson, the Hurstwick banker, could come and fetch her. Those were her very words, sir, and she put five sovereigns down on the table."

Tom bowed his head. Eleanor had not then spoken of him as her husband, that so far was satisfactory.

"I said," continued Miss Martha—" for I could see how things were with her and thought it best you should know where she was, sir—I said I shall have no objection if you will send a line at once to your husband, ma'am, the post-boy will see it is posted—our letterpost is gone for to-day. So she sat down and wrote the note which she handed to me to head with the proper address. Ah, sir! it's sad she couldn't have had the pleasure of showing you the baby herself: she thought it would be 'a pleasant surprise' for you, poor dear!"

And Martha wiped the moisture from her eyes, while Mary's tears fell in a bright shower as, with her hands in her lap, she stared into the fire.

"Go on," said Tom, hoarsely, and unable to sit still, he paced up and down the little room. "Tell me everything she said and did."

"Well, as I said before, sir, she was very bright and not at all ill. She told us a lot that first evening about

the poor Irish. It seems, at least so I gathered, that she had been working with them, helping to give them food, nursing them, and so on in the terrible famine time. I think, too, though I'm not quite sure," continued Martha, "that she went over more than once to New York with some of the emigrants. She said they were wretched creatures, perfect skeletons some of them, and that they could not bear to leave their native land. But you will have heard all about them from her, sir," and the narrator paused for an assurance from her interested listener.

This was all news to Tom, but he merely inclined his head gravely, which movement might either siginfy assent or merely an intimation to proceed with the recital.

"She also said her husband had been detained on the sea or somewhere, but she felt certain you would have returned by now. You have been away on the sea, haven't you, sir?"

And Miss Barnard again broke off, determined not only to convict the man before her, but also to convince Mary of the righteousness of her own theory with regard to him.

"I am but just returned," briefly responded Tom.

"'Yes,' she said, 'my husband went to New Zealand to discover some people who settled there nine or ten years ago,' and she thought the war there had interfered with his plans. You have been to New Zealand, sir, haven't you?" said Martha, true to the Socratic method she delighted in.

And again Tom could reply with truth that he had just returned from an unsuccessful attempt to land in New Zealand, his object having been to search for a Hurstwick family he was anxious not to lose sight of.

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Miss Martha was overjoyed to see how well things were fitting themselves to her theory, and even Mary found herself inclined to own that her sister, as usual, had been right in her conclusions. As for Ronaldson, the question hammered itself-a truly repeatinghammer of a question—into his brain, What was Eleanor's object, she a very mirror of truthfulness, what was her object in confounding facts as seemed abundantly evident? Why have placed him in so false, so unpleasant a position? Why had she not plainly said she had written to and was expecting her brother? But what would be the good of contradicting this opinionated woman until he had consulted those unopened letters and heard what Brotherton knew; or had visited the Mountjoys and learned all they knew of Eleanor? What avail to tell this Miss Barnard, until he held the key to Eleanor's desire for secrecy, that two years had elapsed since he left England for the Antipodes, since he had seen Eleanor? Why endeavour to enlighten her as to the improbability of any one going to and from New Zealand under ten months if business of an indefinite nature was to be transacted? When in possession of all the facts it would be a comparatively easy matter to convince the lady of the egregious mistake she was making.

So Tom thought, but he did not then know how tenaciously Martha Barnard clung to a theory she had herself evolved, neither could he foresee that he would be unable to produce the facts necessary to disprove this particular one.

"Tell me about her illness," he said, with some abruptness.

"She was up yesterday morning, sir, and delighted

to find the snow had gone. She was in the bedroom most of the morning, reading and resting, I think, and in the afternoon she went a little way on the moor with Mary; she thought the air would do her good. About five o'clock she was taken very ill; we got her to bed at once and did all we could for her. Whenever she could speak she called 'Tom, Tom!' and we soothed her all we could, telling her you would be here first thing this morning, and that if she didn't excite herself she would be able to see you as soon as you arrived. She seemed so strong, I never thought there was any real danger, though, from what she had told me, I knew it would be a terrible thing for her to be ill anywhere away from you and Hurstwick. She was most anxious to get there, she said, before she fell ill."

- "Didn't she try to write to me?" inquired Tom, with thickened utterance.
- "Lord love you, sir, the poor dear was much too ill to hold a pencil or even a thought. I sent five miles for the doctor, but the sweet creature sank directly after he got upstairs."

There was silence in the little room, its three occupants overcome by emotion they could not restrain. Tom was the first to recover himself.

- "What did she say?" was his brief inquiry.
- "She said, sir, that her illness was caused by the post-boy's careless driving, or rather that she was not strong enough to be driving or travelling at all."
 - "The child, did she know of it?"
- "Oh, yes, she knew of it, sir, and a heavenly smile was on her face when I held it for her to see. 'It's a boy,' I cried, 'won't his father be pleased?' But she went off in a dead faint, and only came to for a

few minutes when I was out of the room finding something for the child."

"You didn't leave her alone?" said Tom, sharply.

"No, sir, I knew my duty better than that. I'd a woman as well as Mary with her, and the brandy brought her to for a minute or so."

"Did she say nothing?" demanded Ronaldson, fixedly regarding Mary, as she turned at the mention of her name.

"She opened her eyes, sir, and tried so hard to speak." Here Mary broke into irrepressible sobs. "I stooped down," she continued, brokenly, "quite close to her, and she whispered 'John.' Then she looked at me till I said, 'John, yes,' then——"

"Ah, Mary," interrupted the elder Miss Barnard, authoritatively, "I don't think you heard her correctly. It is easy to make a mistake at such times. I feel sure, sir," she continued, addressing herself to the banker, "that your wife said 'Tom,' not 'John.'"

"No, sister, she said 'John,' I'm positive," corrected Mary, with convincing emphasis, which made itself felt in spite of her sobs. "She even tried to make the word with her finger on the sheet, but when she had traced the 'J' her hand fell, and——"

The girl could add no more, and Tom, gulping down the lump in his throat, said with an effort, "And John the child shall be called."

Here was at least one fact unconnected with himself that he might work at for the elucidation of the mystery. Then he asked what luggage his sister brought, and went upstairs to examine it. It consisted solely of a cowhide bag Tom well remembered, and which bore her name in large black letters, "Eleanor Ronaldson"—there had been no room for

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her second name "Gavin." He searched it for papers, as well as her pockets, but found none of any importance, not even an envelope with her maiden or married name. She had evidently carried the bag with her, for it bore no labels, no clue to the route she had taken. But from the presence of "greenbacks" in her purse, along with English money, she certainly must have come direct from America, as Miss Martha had opined.

Oppressed by the sense of mystery which almost outweighed the sense of loss, after making certain necessary arrangements, he left Heather's Edge for Hurstwick, promising to return in five or six days. But to Martha's disgust and Mary's distress, he neither saw nor expressed a wish to see the child who, unwittingly, had robbed him of his sister.



CHAPTER III.

Those we love, we love for everything, even for the pain they have given us.—Walter Savage Landor.

ALTHOUGH Ronaldson would not permit himself to entertain a doubt as to the speedy clearing-up of everything that appeared mysterious in regard to his sister's marriage and death, he was, nevertheless, completely crushed by these events. She had been his sole confidante, the one joy remaining to him after the departure of his friend, Lord James Bagshot Warner. Indeed, from their motherless childhood the brother and sister had been bound to each other by the strongest ties of affection.

When later on "Lord Jim" and Tom became bosom friends, Eleanor was never permitted to consider herself de trop, and if she did not actually participate in their hare-brained enterprises, she was always consulted before the event, and manifested the keenest interest in every detail of its working.

It was Eleanor, then close upon eighteen, who helped to disguise the friends for the "B.B.-D.V.A.," which abbreviations stood for "the Ben Boles-Dame Vernon Attack," with the trio. It was paint placed by her fingers on the aristocratic nose of "Lord Jim" that so effectually transformed it, and made the young nobleman loathly in the sight of the Marquis some hours later. And it was Eleanor's money that Tom after-

wards slipped into his friend's coat-pocket on Brickington highway, for Tom was just then too low in funds to pay his lost wager.

Though her share in this and similar exploits was unknown to any but her fellow-conspirators, Mr. Ronaldson, senior, was, from time to time, reminded by the ladies of his acquaintance that his daughter's prospects would be utterly ruined if she were not sent abroad to enjoy the companionships and avocations of her own age and sex. But it was not until the Christmas following the Feringham Wood affray and the news of Lord Jim's death, that Eleanor would entertain the idea of leaving home.

Tom at the same time expressed a wish to go to London and seriously study for the banking business, for he was not altogether at his ease. Boles was convalescent, and Boles was filled with an insensate rage against the young keeper, Randall; there was no telling what Boles might unearth, so it would be as well to get away from the town.

The report of the young nobleman's death neither Eleanor nor Tom believed. They were firmly convinced that he was never on board the *Sultan*. Earnestly and with closed doors they discussed the situation. Jim had distinctly said he would never use his title again. Was it likely he would advertise everybody of his whereabouts when he might be wanted any moment for knocking Boles and Randall over? No, this was a blind, a ruse on Jim's part.

So the two, keeping their own counsel, gave no credence to what the Abbey people and Hurstwickians generally regarded as incontrovertible evidence of the young nobleman's death, namely, that Lord Blakenbridge had booked No. 4 cabin for himself

and Lord James Bagshot Warner (as the clerk at the shipping office affirmed). Certainly there was no denying that Lord Blakenbridge was on board *The Sultan*.

The brother and sister, however, looked forward to the exile's return when all possibility of his connection with the poaching affray was removed. The keepers, mercifully, were both recovering, and Tom pictured Jim in some safe, secret shelter where, effectually concealed, he might make himself cognisant of the passage of events in Hurstwick. So the brother and sister determined to follow out their father's frequently-expressed wishes, but at the end of two years they were at home again, their affection for each other more deeply rooted than ever.

Yet no news from Jim had reached Tom or the Abbey. A monument or rather a marble tablet to his memory had been placed in the Pierton private chapel, yet Eleanor and Tom still believed him to be alive. But when the Randalls had left the town and the country, it seemed strange to them he should make no sign.

"He means to keep that vow of not returning," remarked Tom. "Well, I said I wouldn't have my hair cut till he came back, and I haven't had it cut, and I won't have it cut!"

Eleanor mildly observed that self-torture in public was quite out of fashion, and, moreover, was of no practical value whatever.

"If any man deserves punishment for that affair, it is I, Tom Ronaldson."

"Well, get a hair-shirt, dear, that will be quite as effective as a hair-coat, I should say," counselled the sister.

"But it wouldn't punish me as much. Besides,

I said I wouldn't have my hair cut till he came back, that was my bargain. I'll stand to it, cost what it will. That wager cost Jim his home. Am I to suffer nothing?"

Eleanor sighed. "I'm with you whatever you do, old boy—long hair or short hair, I am yours till death."

But one by one Tom's former associates dropped him as his raven locks, in wavy lines, hung longer, and in ever-increasing length, until they threatened to descend to his waist. Dandies did not care to be seen with a fellow who was evidently demented, or bent on making himself ridiculous.

His father, however, was willing to condone this eccentricity as he noted Tom's growing devotion to the banking business, which promised, under his auspices, to become one of the most wealthy and important private concerns in the country. As for his former companions Tom did not lament their desertion. Eleanor's constant affection and unfailing sympathy proved amply compensatory.

The devotion of the sister and brother, indeed, formed at one time the subject of universal comment in "sleepy old Hurstwick." At first it was commended, and held up as an example to all brothers and sisters in the somnolent borough and its neighbourhood. But as years rolled by the comment took on a censorious flavour. Such affection was uncalled for, even unnatural! A girl of twenty-two (or was she not twenty-three?) ought to marry. Especially a girl who might undoubtedly be regarded as an heiress, and who in addition to wealth had, undeniably, good looks to transmit.

But Eleanor turned a deaf ear to her many suitors, several of whom were troublesomely persevering,

refusing to regard her "No" as a final answer. And so it was that the mothers of these young men began to look upon and speak with disfavour of the handsome Miss Ronaldson.

"There's something queer in the family. Look, for instance, at Tom with hair that many women would give half their fortune for. And the girl refusing Lord Marcus Tuke! There's a something, you may depend—insanity, perhaps, one never knows."

And tongues wagged, and Eleanor heeded them not. She was not, however, averse to the prospect of being out of earshot of them when soon after her father's death the Mountjoys invited her to Dublin. Jim would never come back now, he must have gone down in *The Sultan*. But Tom should go to New Zealand, and see that all was right with Fred Randall. He had promised "Lord Jim" to look after him, then the brother and sister would settle down together for life.

Such had been their programme, but alas! it would never, could never now be carried out.

The old stone-house in High Street, the home of many departed Ronaldsons, wore an air of befitting mournfulness as Tom drove up in the gloom of a November dawn. He had set out with such delight to fetch Eleanor, glad she was so unexpectedly near and that he had not to go to Dublin for her. How different the prospect to the reality! Eleanor had always declared to him that she would never marry. What manner of man had at length prevailed upon her to listen to his suit?

Who was the fortunate individual she had favoured? Was he worthy of her? Why was he not at her side? Why, indeed, had he ever left her?

These, and other questions, presented themselves to his troubled mind during the long journey from Heather's Edge Cottage, and hoping to effectually silence their importunity, Tom shut himself up in his study as soon as he reached home. Giving orders that Mr. Brotherton should be requested to wait upon him at once, he set himself to examine the parcel of unopened letters from which he hoped so much.

But they gave him no information respecting Eleanor's courtship or marriage. The first his eye fell on was in her handwriting, and evidently written some six months after the brother and sister had parted. It was headed "Barra Barra, co. Galway."

"Although" [it ran] "I know you cannot receive this until you return to 'sleepy old Hurstwick' (I may be there, too, then), I feel I must tell you what I am doing, that if blame attaches to anyone you may know that I alone deserve it. I have given up all idea of the continental tour (you and I must go together some day) and intend to spend my time and money here. Oh! my dear Tom, if you knew the suffering, the starvation of these poor souls (they are almost bodiless) I'm sure you would say I am right to try to help them. You need not be the least bit anxious about me, for I'm well cared for, though this district is one of the worst on the west coast. I'm one of three lady volunteers working under the Rev. John Jones, a devoted clergyman who inspires every one with his own enthusiasm. I do hope you are well and enjoying your sail. I'm quite looking forward to our life together when you return. At six o'clock each morning 'I am in heaven for you.' God bless and preserve you ever!—Your loving sister, "Eleanor."

Tom's eyes were moist as he read the foregoing, the only one from Eleanor. There were letters of an earlier date from the Mountjoys, the first informing him that, spite of remonstrances and entreaties on their part, Eleanor had insisted on going to the west coast with two older ladies to act as a private relief committee under the guidance of the Rev. John Jones,

a Welshman, of whom nothing further was known in Dublin.

The latter letter stated that Mrs. Mountjoy was then ignorant of her late visitor's whereabouts. When she last heard from her she was about to accompany a party of emigrants to New York or Canada. The writer was evidently annoyed at Miss Ronaldson's desertion, and did not saruple to assert that the girl had acted very foolishly. She, Mrs. Mountjoy, however, was in no wise to blame, and Tom must acquit her of all responsibility for his sister's subsequent doings. This was most unsatisfactory, but all Tom's searching elicited no further information, and he was feeling sorely depressed when Mr. Brotherton (whom he had been unable to see before he left for Heather's Edge) entered.

"Why, sir," exclaimed the latter, anxiety in every tone as he noted the banker's dejected appearance. "You are looking none the better for your voyaging. And Miss Eleanor? Is she well?"

"She is dead, Brotherton," Tom managed to say, and then his pent-up, but now unsubduable emotion, broke forth in heart-rending sobs to the consternation of the faithful old servant of the firm.

"Dead?" he echoed. "No, no! that cannot be! I received a letter from her a fortnight ago, and—Dear, dear, this is terrible, terrible, my dear young sir."

"Yet there are some things worse than death, Brotherton," Tom said, when by a supreme effort he recovered some measure of self-control, though the storm of grief at his heart revealed its presence in his quivering lips and stilted utterance. "To find her dead in the midst of strangers, no familiar hand or voice to comfort or close her eyes, was in itself

sufficient to wound me to the quick. But to find her a wife and mother, yet to be in utter ignorance of the name or whereabouts of her husband, completely unmans me. Did you know of her marriage?" concluded the bereaved man, his tones now stern and anxious.

"Indeed, I did not, sir. I had one letter from her when you had been gone a little over a year."

"You've got it? Eh, that's right; now let me hear it, date and all."

"Certainly," returned the other, opening a drawer containing filed letters.

Poste Restante, New York. November 30, 1847.

Dhar Mr. Brotherton,—Will you let me know at once my brother's whereabouts in so far as you are acquainted with them? I am particularly anxious to know whether he is likely to return before the time we originally fixed, viz., next November. I shall be glad, too, if you can give me any address that will be likely to find him within the next few months. I take this opportunity of saying that I am about to withdraw through the New York Bank five hundred rounds of the amount standing to my credit at Houst. five hundred pounds of the amount standing to my credit at Hurstwick (making in all £1,000 since I left England). How are you and all Hurstwickians? Though I hope to be back in the sleepy old town before long, any news of it will be welcome.—Faithfully yours, ELBANOR RONALDSON.

P.S.—Let me have a line at above address whenever you hear from my brother.

"And this is the copy of my reply," continued the manager.

The Bank, Hurstwick, England. December 30th, 1847.

DEAR MADAM, -I am in receipt of your favour of the 30th ult; and in reply beg to inform you that the only letter I have as yet received from your brother arrived at the close of September last. It contains instructions relative to certain securities and other financial business, and empowers me to act for him in one or two matters, thus emphasizing his intention (elsewhere definitely expressed) of not returning to England for another ten or twelve months. I copy the following from his letter. "If you are aware of my sister's present whereabouts, please tell her it is extremely improbable that I shall reach Hurstwick until next October or

early November. I fear that it will be useless to give you any early reovember. I tear that it will be useless to give you any address as my movements are so uncertain, while a letter from me will scarcely travel faster than I can. Therefore, remember that no news is good news." His letter was posted at Port Arthur, Tasmania, but was evidently written before the vessel arrived there. You kindly enquire after my health and the old town. I think I may say both are looking up, especially the town, for the Marquis appears to have quite discarded the melancholy which enwrapped him for so many years after the death of the Marchionese. enwrapped him for so many years after the death of the Marchioness and is mixing in society again. I understand that the health of the Earl of Towermains is not in a satisfactory state. I note that you intend to withdraw the sum of £500. Your investments have proved singularly good this year. You have now £19,540 standing to your credit.—I remain, de Miss E. Ronaldson. -I remain, dear madam, your obedient servant,

JOSHUA BROTHERTON.

"Then Mrs. Mountjoy was right. My sister must have accompanied a party of emigrants to New York. Ah, I forgot; you are wondering why she went to America! Here is a letter I found this morning; it will explain why the European tour was abandoned, and here is one from Mrs. Mountjoy. You say you received a letter from my sister a fortnight ago. Where is it?"

"Here, sir, upon the file. It is merely a request that I would read and give you 'the enclosed' on your arrival. 'Please give my brother the enclosed when he arrives, after reading it yourself. Should you have any fresh news let me have it at Brooklyn Hotel, Liverpool, not later than November 5th.' you see, it is not signed, sir."

"Neither is mine, otherwise than 'Eleanor,' which seems strange," mused Tom, as he glanced over the few lines. They ran:

DEAR TOM,—I'm coming home as quickly as I can. I have indeed arranged to leave New York on or about the 18th inst.; and should be due at Liverpool about the 5th or 6th prox. If I hear nothing to the contrary from Mr. Brotherton, I shall conclude you are at home and will then telegraph and ask you to meet me somewhere, probably at Brickington. You can't tell how I long

to be at home again, and oh! how very much I have to tell you! God grant us a happy meeting. I must not add more or I shall miss the mail.—Your loving ELBANOR.

"This is dated October 10th."

"Yes, sir, just about a week before she sailed, or perhaps more, for it reached me ten days before I expected your arrival."

"I wish I had had this letter before I set off to

Heather's Edge."

"All the letters were in readiness, filed, as you see, sir; and had I known when you arrived I would have run down here to meet you. But you were so late I had quite given you up for the night."

"I wouldn't have you disturbed, Brotherton;

but what reply did you make to my sister?"

"I had just received your letter from Marseilles, so I wrote and told Miss —— your sister that you would be at home, or rather that you purposed to be at home, at latest by the 6th."

"Ha! that explains, then, why she telegraphed so confidently from the Brooklyn Hotel, asking me to meet her at Brickington. She had requested you to let her know if I made any change in my plans. She could not have reached there until the 7th, I should think, for that is the date on the telegram. But this brings us no nearer to the solution of the mystery. I must set out at once for New York."

"But you couldn't be back in time for the funeral, sir," urged Brotherton. "Why not go direct to this Barra-Barra in Ireland? The clergyman Jones is named John, I see, and you say your sister wished the baby to be called John. Don't be down-hearted, sir, and don't let it be supposed for one moment that there is anything to hide with regard to your sister. Hurst-

wick may be sleepy, but it's a very monkey-jungle for chatter if it catches a glint of scandal beneath its half-open eye."

"Of course, she is the soul of honour, I know that well enough. Besides, this Miss Barnard tells me she had expressed the hope that her baby would be born in Hurstwick," said Tom, though his tones were very despondent. "What puzzles me is the remarkable manner in which she must have confounded me with her absent husband."

And Ronaldson detailed all the facts he had learned at Heather's Edge, and the singular and unpleasant conclusions drawn by the mistress of that comfortable little dwelling-house.

"All will come right, you'll find, sir; these women have mixed things up. It seems to me just probable," continued Brotherton, tentatively, as he examined afresh the first letter Eleanor had written to him, "that your sister may have had some idea of getting married when she wrote this, and perhaps would have postponed the wedding if you had been likely to return earlier."

"I don't know what to think," rejoined Tom, dubiously.

"It's best to keep an open mind, perhaps. But we must know something definite as soon as possible, sir, for her death ought to be announced in *The Advertiser* immediately."

"You forget we don't know her name," said Tom, bitterly.

"No, but you'll find that out, sir, at Barra-Barra," replied Brotherton, with an assumption of confidence barely skin-deep. "You had better post, sir," he continued, as Tom rose with the evident purpose of

getting off at once; "our line, the Great Way Round, as we call it, will be no help to you."

And the faithful creature's parting words, "A husband must be found," repeated themselves in the footfalls of the posting horses, and in every revolution of paddle and carriage wheels until Barra-Barra was reached.

But it was to Liverpool Tom went first, for from the Brooklyn Hotel Eleanor had despatched her telegram. There he learned that a lady—a Mrs. Ronaldson, that was the name upon her bag—arrived late on the night of the 6th, and left about six o'clock on the evening of the 7th. She was quite alone, took her meals in her room, and, it was understood, had crossed from New York in the *Titania*.

At Barra-Barra, where Tom at once proceeded, he had the singular good fortune, as he then regarded it, to fall in with Miss Enstone, one of the trio of ladies who had worked under the Rev. John Jones. Though the relief works had been practically abandoned for close upon twelve months, she had remained in the place, aiding those who had survived starvation or withstood the temptation to emigrate, to earn a scant livelihood.

On receiving Tom's card Miss Enstone accorded him a warm welcome. She had heard of him, she explained, from his sister, who had frequently spoken of him.

- "I have lost her," Ronaldson said, simply, but with such pathos there was no mistaking the sad import of his words.
- "Lost her?" echoed the lady, "then she has indeed known but a brief spell of married life."
 - "Please tell me all you know about her, madam.

I only reached Hurstwick five days ago, and I had no idea of her marriage until I heard of her death."

"Indeed!" and Miss Enstone's single ejaculation was perhaps as kind, as effective a herald of coming unpleasantness as under the circumstances could have been impressed for that office.

But Tom was as though he heard it not.

"When my sister and I parted," he continued, "it was with the understanding that she as well as myself would be travelling for about two years, and, as our movements would necessarily be uncertain, we agreed to forego correspondence. She, however, wrote me when she first came here, though the letter, naturally, did not reach me until my return to Hurstwick, the day before her death. In that letter she tells me the necessities of the poor starving Irish so wrought upon her that she determined to give up the intended Continental tour and devote herself to their relief. Will you be good enough to tell me when she left here for America and all you know of her marriage?"

"I think it will be better for me to give you a brief history of our work," said Miss Enstone, "for your sister's marriage is no doubt an outcome of that work. Miss Ronaldson came here, as she told you in her letter, and was not only a great help in the matter of actual labour, but was ever ready with money for the purchase of food and clothing. The great desire of Mr. Jones was to encourage these Barra-Barra people to emigrate to America, his design being to form a little community of Irish there. Land was to be purchased and stocked with animals, implements, and cereals; cottages were to be built. Lace-making, laundry work, and other industries were to be carried on by the females; farming, building, and carpentry by the men. We were

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all greatly interested in this scheme, and your sister promised the large amount of £500, which Mr. Jones said would be sufficient for the purchase of land and the farm stock. Land was very cheap there, he said. Well, the long and short of it was that seventy of these people fell in with the proposal, and in October or November of last year your sister, Miss Pearce, and Mr. Jones accompanied these emigrants to New York."

Tom was all attention; he could so well realise the enthusiasm Eleanor would throw into such an undertaking.

"I do not care for the water," continued Miss Enstone, "so I remained here, and all further history of the work and your sister's connection with it has come to me through Miss Pearce. It appears that on reaching New York many of the Irish females were quite unfit for further travel. Moreover, the land had yet to be purchased and the cottages erected. So, as I understand, your sister volunteered to remain in New York and look after the women and sick, while Miss Pearce and Mr. Jones, with the men folk, went further up the country to inspect the land that had been offered for sale and which, I believe, lay on the north bank of the Hudson. Some months passed before all was ready for the reception of those left in New York. If my memory serves me rightly, it was the end of February or early in March when Miss Ronaldson brought up her party to the farm which Mr. Jones had purchased and christened 'Patricia.' It naturally was an arduous business, this of arranging the different departments, and Mr. Jones's health, Miss Pearce tells me, began to flag about June last, and something was said about his returning to England.

When that question was mooted, it seems your sister expressed a desire to travel to England at the same time. She wished to be at home, she said, to welcome you on your return. Miss Pearce's suspicions were aroused by one or two little circumstances, and the long and short of it was she taxed your sister with: having privately married Mr. Jones. Your sister told her she had better address her remarks to that gentle-There was a good deal of friction, I gather from Miss Pearce's letters, and matters came to such a pass that she refused to work any longer with your sister. The outcome of her resolution was that Mr. Jones and Miss Ronaldson left Patricia last August with the avowed intention of proceeding direct to England, via New York. But in her last letter Miss Pearce told me that they were both in New York City as late as the close of last September.- That is all I know of the matter."

"Thank you, very much," said Tom, gratefully. "There is no question that my sister was lawfully married to this gentleman. She was the soul of honour, and though her generous impulses often carried her into peculiar situations, she could never act dishonourably. I can understand even that there would be wisdom in not proclaiming the marriage to that little community."

"Perhaps so; still, Miss Pearce might have been made acquainted with it, one would have thought."

"I shall go over to New York directly after the funeral, when I expect I shall find Mr. Jones has been anxiously awaiting news of Eleanor's arrival at Hurstwick."

"But why should he not have accompanied her?"

^{. &}quot;My dear lady, you shall know all when I have seen

him. For aught I know he may be waiting at my house at this very moment."

Yet hopefully as Tom spoke, his mind was greatly disquieted by Miss Enstone's story. And he could not resist the conviction that she was keeping something back, that Miss Pearce's statements or insinuations had been watered down.

Yet the simple fact she had detailed—viz., that Eleanor had remained in New York with Mr. Jones for some weeks prior to her return to England—was, in itself, a guarantee that that gentleman was her husband.

"No smoke without fire," Tom translated "No love without marriage" in Eleanor's case. "Eleanor was Eleanor," he told himself over and over again, which was simply a variation of that eternal truth, "The Queen can do no wrong."

Naturally she had desired to be the first to tell her brother of the new relationship she had entered into; she would have asked her husband to go to his friends first, and join her later, when she would have acquainted Tom with the remarkable history of her past two years of life. Mr. Jones had, of course, all her papers with him.

And Tom by degrees had mapped out the probable programme the pair had drawn up, and before retiring to rest at the little inn, where he was compelled to sojourn for the night, he wrote at some length to Brotherton telling him that Mr. Jones was, without a doubt, the missing husband. Ronaldson went so far even as to advise his manager that Mr. Jones might himself be expected to reach Hurstwick at any moment. And, with that probability in view, he authorised Brotherton to open any letters addressed either to

himself or his sister which might arrive in his absence.

Having posted this epistle Tom, with a mind somewhat relieved, went to bed, the landlord promising to secure him a seat in the mail-cart next morning, that being the quickest mode of travelling from Barra-Barra.

While waiting for the driver to breakfast before commencing the return journey a note was put into Ronaldson's hands. It was from Miss Enstone.

DEAR MR. RONALDSON,—The mail has just brought me The New York Tribune, from which I have copied the following and hasten to send it, knowing it will prove of interest to you. It occurs under the heading "Deaths." "At New York, on the 9th of October, after a lingering illness, the Rev. John Jones, M.A., of Llanfair, Wales, Barra-Barra, Ireland, and Patricia, New York State, aged fifty-six years."

Tom stumbled into the now waiting vehicle. Before his face the heavens and the earth fled away and the mountains were not. The old landmarks had vanished, he saw a new heaven and a new earth and his soul moaned dumbly, for Eleanor and honour found no place therein.



CHAPTER IV.

There are dark abysses and yawning gulfs in the human heart which can be rendered passable only by bridging them over with iron nerves and sinews.—Longfellow.

But the breeze, borne from the Atlantic, by degrees penetrated to his consciousness, and before he reached the railway station he had resolved on another course of action.

Avoiding Dublin and the Mountjoys, he took train for the Cove of Cork (now Queenstown) and, arrived there, telegraphed to Brotherton: "Attend funeral in my absence. Address me Poste Restante, New York. Letter follows."

Better be absent from the funeral than permit Miss Barnard's tongue to embitter that closing scene with caustic, if natural, inquiries. To go to Heather's Edge with the story that Eleanor's husband had died a month ago, would be about as wise a thing to do as to remove the flood-gates during a heavy downpour. No, there must be some other solution than that of the Enstone-Pearce, and Tom was determined to discover it.

Arrived in New York, he immediately waited upon Justice Matsell, chief of "the Star Police," as the guardians of public safety in that city were then styled. This gentleman was able to confirm the statement that the Rev. John Jones lay ill for many weeks in Rose Street and that he was buried in

Brooklyn Cemetery. But whether he was married or not, he could not say. No doubt the landlady of the house where he lodged would be able to tell Mr. Ronaldson.

Though the wealthy New Yorkers at that time were being gradually swept further and further from the Battery and Harbour, there were still persons of means residing in Rose Street. But the landlady of the late Rev. John Jones was a coarse, disagreeable creature, as Tom found to his cost when he begged her for details of that clergyman's life under her roof. She evidently resented her late lodger's lengthened illness, for it had prevented her letting her other spare rooms.

"He had every attention? His wife was devoted to him?" Ronaldson ventured.

"Um! Well, it's not for me to talk. She paid handsomely for the two of them, and if she wasn't his wife, all I can say is she ought to have been. You're her brother, you say? Um! pity you didn't come here sooner."

And Tom never in all his life felt so small as when this coarse creature swept him down from top to toe with a glance that spoke volumes of contempt.

"I'm bound to tell you though, for I owe her no grudge, that she did no more for the dying man than she would have done for any poor creature in like case. As I understood, she would have joined her husband (whom she said she was to meet in England) long ago, only she couldn't leave the Rev'rend to die alone. It was cancer, that's what it was with him, and the doctor wouldn't hear of his being moved. No, she was never called anything but Ronaldson. I called her Mrs. Ronaldson, but some folks down by the Battery knew her as 'Miss,' and nobody had

ever heard of her English husband. She was one as helped the Irishers, but it wasn't till after his funeral as I found all that out. Here, she scarce stirred outside the door. Well, good morning; I can't tell you more if I stop all day."

So Eleanor expected to find her husband in England! And Miss Barnard had positively affirmed that Eleanor's husband had gone to New Zealand. But then Miss Barnard was equally sure that Tom was Eleanor's husband! What a labyrinth of garbled facts!

Yet there must be a clue somewhere, and Tom was resolved to find it.

He made house-to-house visits among the denizens of the Battery and Five Points districts, but though here and there a watchman or private individual recalled Miss Ronaldson as an almoner ten or twelve months before, no one ever referred to her past or prospective marriage. As a matter of fact very few, if any, of the emigrants she brought out had remained in New York, and the rush for the Californian gold-mines in the spring had utterly changed the population in those quarters. So, as a last resort, Ronaldson betook himself to Miss Pearce at Patricia.

He found the little colony in a state of collapse, nearly all the male members having deserted en masse for California. Miss Pearce was bravely endeavouring to find positions as cooks, laundry-maids, and "helps" for all the women, excepting the lace-makers. These latter she hoped she might keep together and make the association self-supporting. Tom promised to assist in the winding-up and sale of the farm and stock, as well as in the matter of an endowment for the lace school. Miss Pearce, in her turn, promised to make strict inquiry of those still under her care who

had remained in New York with Miss Ronaldson while Patricia was being prepared for their reception. For Tom felt convinced, as he told Miss Pearce, that it was then, and there, Eleanor formed the acquaintance that ripened into marriage.

Miss Pearce could give no opinion on that point. She had been much pained by what she had discovered last July; she was indeed indignant that matters should have gone so far. Mr. Jones had not denied the marriage, for the simple reason that Miss Pearce had never taxed him with it. But then they saw no other gentleman; indeed Miss Ronaldson had never left Patricia for an hour since she arrived there the beginning of March.

"The baby, you tell me, was born on the 10th of November. Well, as I said before, I am not in a position to speak of who she might, or did, meet in New York before she came up here, and I have never questioned the girls. They were deeply attached to her, and it was chiefly that her influence with them might not be injured or impaired that I insisted on her leaving us. I will, however, since you desire it, make inquiry of them."

But the result was extremely unsatisfactory. The girls and women remembered no one their "blessed Miss Ronaldson—glory be to God! ever 'took up with' unless it were the good Father Jeremy, the little dark praste she would bring sometimes to speak with them at their bedsides. And sometimes she would go with him to see some poor English. But the good father—glory be to God!—had gone over the say, he had told them he would do so, to teach the poor haythens."

That was the net result of Miss Pearce's inquiries,

and when Ronaldson had ferreted out the doctor who attended Mr. Jones in his last illness, and had searched every church register in the city, he felt he was no nearer the solution of the mystery than he was when he knelt beside Eleanor's lifeless form at Heather's Edge Cottage. Truly this marriage must have been a very secret affair. Yet, what should make secrecy necessary?

It was this air of mystery with which Eleanor had herself invested the position that distressed Tom so greatly, and the more he tried to disperse it, the more he dreaded what its possible dispersion might disclose.

This Father Jeremy who had gone across the sea—had he assumed the priest's garb, or was he the genuine article? Surely it was not to him that Eleanor had referred when she spoke of New Zealand. But no stone must be left unturned; this "little dark praste" must, if possible, be found. Yet what could induce a man, newly married, and to such a woman as Eleanor, to leave his wife and go off to the Antipodes? The question was an insult to both husband and wife. No; Eleanor must have married Mr. Jones, perhaps before leaving Ireland.

But to New Zealand Tom decided to go, and before setting sail gave explicit orders that the announcement of his sister's death should appear in the New York City daily newspapers for three months, as follows:—"On November 10th, 1848, at Friston-Boughton, Derbyshire, Eleanor Gavin Ronaldson, late of Hurstwick, England, aged 27 years. Australian and New Zealand papers please copy."

Ronaldson spent more than a year on the New Zealand Islands, and during that time learned that the elder Randall had formed one of the party of

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English under Captain Wakefield, massacred in 1843, at Wairau, by the chiefs Rauperaha and Rhangihaeta. But of Mrs. Randall, her son, or her son's wife, he discovered no trace.

The failure of the English Government to recognise and confirm the claims of the New Zealand Land Company to the lands they asserted they had honourably purchased from the natives, had led many would-be settlers, brought over by the Company, to abandon the Colony in disgust. But whether Fred Randall had been one to do so, or whether he had been killed in one of the numerous conflicts between the whites and natives, Ronaldson failed to discover.

Of Eleanor, or anyone connected with her, he, as he had opined, heard nothing, and though the Roman Catholics had several missionaries in New Zealand, none answered to "the little dark praste" the Irish girls had spoken of, so Tom dismissed him from the position of a possible actor in his sister's secret marriage.

During a five years' search, in which period Ronaldson was accredited by his acquaintances in England with the establishment of branch banks in New York and Australia, no news reached him from Hurstwick of the missing husband. But Brotherton was anxious to consult his principal on important business affairs, so Tom turned homeward, telegraphing by the first submarine cable in the Channel to his manager to meet him in Paris.

Then he learned, for the first time, that Brotherton, acting on the instructions Tom had sent from Barra-Barra, had felt no scruple in appropriating the dead Jones as Eleanor's husband. Hurstwickians, he said, had accepted, with more or less comment, the notice

he had inserted in *The Hurstwick Advertiser* the week of her death, which, while it proclaimed her demise, proclaimed her also as the widow of the late Rev. John Jones of Barra-Barra. He had had numerous inquiries from acquaintances and friends, but was able to silence impertinent curiosity by the simple statement that both she and her husband, without a doubt, had fallen victims to their benevolent efforts to aid the Irish.

"Foolish woman, to throw away her beauty and wealth on a mere nobody; but Eleanor Ronaldson was always too independent, or rather self-willed, 'to make a success.' And why wasn't the body brought to Hurstwick?"

Brotherton had uniformly replied that Mr. Ronaldson was away in America, and for the present things would remain as they were. But he was bound to confess that he had found himself unable to meet or parry Miss Barnard's questions. She told him to his face that she would never accept the story of the dead Jones as the husband of the dead Eleanor.

He had filled up the certificate of death with the name Jones, inserting Ronaldson as the maiden name, but this Miss Barnard had characterised as "flat perjury."

"She had a wet nurse for the child, and I didn't want to exasperate her further, so I said you would explain on your return. But six months after the funeral she wrote me that as the boy had been taken suddenly ill she had sent for the clergyman to christen him and had had him duly registered 'John Ronaldson, son of Thomas and Eleanor Ronaldson, of Hurstwick.' She said she wasn't going to have a lie resting on her conscience, neither did she intend to be

a party to keeping the child out of his lawful rights when he grew up. And she ended with some pretty plain remarks on your absenting yourself from the funeral, sir."

"I'd give everything I possess, Brotherton, to get at the bottom of this mystery. God knows it was a sore grief to me not to see her laid in the grave, but I couldn't meet Miss Barnard when I heard that Jones had died a month before Eleanor reached Heather's Edge. It was a great comfort to me to know that you were there and that every respect possible was paid to her memory."

"It was a very quiet affair, sir. I had to take over a Denby clergyman to officiate, for the living of Friston-Boughton was then vacant. It was snowing, and there were not more than half-a-dozen people present. Miss Mary Barnard accompanied me as chief mourner—her sister was much too indignant to attend. Indeed, she is not best pleased that a birth should have taken place in her house, and keeps the child quite in the background."

"They are kind to the boy, though?"

"Very; especially Miss Mary. He grows a fine sturdy little chap. I ran over last week that I might bring you the latest news. But you'll be seeing him yourself soon, sir?"

"Not till I know his father's name, Brotherton. No, I shall continue the search, and when I can greet him by name—his true surname—then I shall be delighted, not only to see him, but to have him with me."

"Then you are determined not to accept Jones as your nephew's father, sir?"

"I cannot bring myself to believe in him. No,

I feel sure there is another solution to this mystery, and I trust before long to find it. You, meanwhile, must look after little Jack for me. If the new clergyman at Friston-Boughton is anything of a scholar, try to arrange with him to give the boy daily lessons. There will be a fair fortune for him when he comes of age, so his education must not be neglected. Later on he must go to the University if the father turns up, if not he shall go abroad."

Shortly after this conversation Ronaldson returned to Hurstwick and, while he threw himself with more ardour than ever into the business of making money, it was tacitly understood by all Hurstwickians that any reference to his sister's death was taboo.

From time to time he went abroad, and branches of the greatly-trusted firm of "Ronaldson and Ronaldson" were established in New York, at the Cape, and also at Valparaiso and Buenos Ayres. Yet with all these aids to communication with the Principal, nobody, either in these remote parts, or at home, ever came forward to offer information regarding the dead Eleanor's marriage.

At length the conviction forced itself upon Tom that Jones, if not her husband, must be accepted as such.

The question of advertising for the marriage certificate Brotherton had always talked down whenever Ronaldson had advanced it.

"People here have accepted Mr. Jones as the husband, to advertise for the marriage certificate, would be to raise doubt in their minds as to a marriage having taken place. For my own part I have no doubt about it, though I am quite willing to admit it was strange your sister made no reference to Jones's death when she

was talking things over at Heather's Edge. But may not her very silence as to his death have been intentional? She may have intended, she doubtless did intend, to take you entirely into her confidence before she returned to Hurstwick. No, sir, take my advice, leave things as they are. As for imagining your sister acted in a reprehensible manner, banish the thought at once and for ever from your mind. You have done your best to find the lad's father and, if you will permit me to say so, I have always thought you would have been better employed in gaining the young fellow's affection."

"Yes, I know you have, Brotherton, and I own I shall find it a difficult job to introduce myself to young Jack now. I said I would adopt him when he was twenty."

"And he will be nineteen next November," remarked Brotherton. "I only hope he will take kindly to the life here, but you mustn't try to force him, sir. What I've seen of him I like, but since I took him over to Geneva four years ago I've had little to do with him. Still, M. Vernet speaks highly of him."

"Well, you shall go next year, and bring him home, Brotherton. He is old enough now to understand things. I dare say he has often wondered why I have not sent for, or seen him, before, but you will explain it all. Tell him just what you like. I know you'll say your best for me."

And Ronaldson sighed. In his heart of hearts he was well aware that had his general appearance been that of an ordinary man he would have felt less embarrassment in introducing himself to his nephew, whom M. Vernet wrote of as "a fine-grown, handsome fellow."

But Brotherton's life work was nearly over, and soon after the foregoing conversation he died, leaving the master whom he had served so devotedly to undertake, and carry through unaided, the difficult task of attracting to himself one who, unknown to him, had conceived for his uncle an aversion that almost amounted to hatred.

To settle the point of Jack's parentage, should any lingering doubt remain in Miss Martha Barnard's mind, Ronaldson had caused a simple headstone, bearing the name of Jones, to be placed above his sister's last resting-place in Friston-Boughton church-yard soon after Brotherton's death. The fact that his nephew had been known from his birth as Jack Ronaldson did not greatly trouble the banker, for he intended to legalise the name when he formally adopted the young man as his son and heir. Yet it was on all accounts of the utmost importance that Jack should be fully acquainted with the fact that he was born "Jones," for, in coming to Hurstwick, people would not fail to question him about his father and mother.

So the banker decided to meet Jack at Heather's Edge in August of the year of grace 1868, when he would lay before him the story of his birth, and also, perhaps, acquaint him with the circumstances which had resulted in his own lengthy chevelure. For although, long before Eleanor's death, he had ceased to doubt that "Lord Jim" went down in The Sultan, he still clung to what Eleanor had fancifully styled his "hair coat."

CHAPTER V.

No heart is pure that is not passionate; No virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic.

–Parker.

THE story of Jack's dramatic appearance on life's stage had been again and again rehearsed to him in his childhood by Martha Barnard; his frequent inquiries about his father being invariably met by mysterious head-shakings, which impressed themselves indelibly upon his waxen mind.

"In the ground wiv muvver?" he would ask, apprehension in his tones.

"There, don't question me. He's no fit company for her above or below ground, and it's a pity on all accounts they can't change places. However, you must see her righted when you're a man!"

But Mary, though she could not in any way explain the mystery of Mr. Ronaldson's continued absence on any other ground than that first advanced by Martha-namely, "that he had another wife somewhere "-had always shrunk from inciting the child's anger against one whose money (as she believed) was always ungrudgingly expended upon him.

Martha, however, allowed no such considerations to subvert her sense of right or to interfere with her proclamation of what she deemed "a cruel wrong."

"A wrong to the dead and to the living." His absence from the funeral after promising to attend it,

the employment of Mr. Brotherton to disseminate lies on purpose to shield himself, the ridiculous story of Mr. Jones; the fact that he had never set eyes on the child, and that the mother's grave was unmarked were "clear proofs of guilt," said Martha, "that none but the wilfully blind could fail to see."

So Martha talked by the fireside, and in the summer parlour at Heather's Edge, while Jack drank in her fierce words, and made up his mind to become a man as quickly as possible that he might expose and denounce the being who had acted so cruelly to the dead. Therefore his spirits rose when he learned from M. Vernet that he was to return to Heather's Edge, where Mr. Ronaldson would meet and discuss the plans for his future. The hour and the man were come. God would defend the right.

The actual meeting took place at Denby railway-station, where it was, of course, impossible to make a declaration of war. Indeed, both uncle and nephew were unable to shake off the embarrassment which mutually affected them at first sight of each other. Jack, six feet in his stockings and with a proportionate breadth of chest and strength of muscle, fought hard to prevent any overt token of the unmistakable aversion which seized upon him when his eyes rested on the long, wavy hair of the man who addressed him as "Nephew." In his secret heart he at once decided that for some great crime the banker had made himself this object of contempt by way of penance.

As for Ronaldson, when his sister's son stepped from the train in all the glory of young manhood, he experienced a painfully acute feeling of disgust at the contrast he was conscious of producing beside him. Jack's averted eyes were a positive torment to

him, and as he took furtive glances at the handsome, open, resolute young countenance he shrank from the task of explanation he had set himself. With a look, or trick of movement characteristic of Eleanor, the east and play of the features wholly differed from hers, yet stirred him strangely, with an undefined, yet sweet, familiarity. If only those features would reveal the lost, the unknown father!

To gain the young fellow's confidence would evidently prove a delicate and difficult business; for though Jack (now seated opposite his uncle in the carriage which, with a pair of horses, had been chartered to carry them to their destination) was courteous in his replies, allied to his well-bred air was a thoroughly definite reserve which proved an effectual barrier to all overtures of a confidential nature.

Ronaldson, who had fondly hoped that the long absence from Heather's Edge would have removed any disagreeable impressions Miss Barnard might have conveyed, now saw himself, with silent dismay, face to face with the distressing probability that the love he had intended and was longing to bestow would be rejected with contempt.

Jack, now in his native county, gave himself up almost entirely to the enjoyment of the delightful scenery through which they were passing, and presently fairly forgot his companion, so absorbed was he in identifying roads and heights and moors familiar to him in boyish rambles.

When the travellers reached the small cluster of grey stone houses known as Friston-Boughton, Jack, as well as the driver, descended while the horses (the banker apparently asleep behind them) took the hill to the side of which the village clung. Jack, on the

qui vive for familiar faces, was specially anxious to discover who the young lady in blue draperies pursuing an upward direction on the side walk, might be. The driver, hailing from Sheafland, knew nothing of Friston people, but, in answer to Jack's inquiry, would be bound that the lady ahead was one of the numerous summer visitors the new railway had brought into the county.

How loudly the measured footfalls of the horses resounded upon the hard, white road, so still was the air! And what a charm that blue-draped figure, with the thick coils of red-gold hair, gave to the sad-coloured houses. The graceful poise of the golden head and carriage of the lissom body made Jack curious to see their owner's face; yet the figure never turned. An open carriage used not to be an every-day event in Friston-Boughton, and Jack recalled with amusement the keen scrutiny he and Jo. bestowed on chance passers through the little place and the romances they would weave about them.

Now the vehicle was gaining on the figure, but just as Jack was congratulating himself he should get a glimpse of the face, the girl passed through a gate leading to a cottage, and said to its occupant, as Jack could distinctly hear, "May I come in, Mrs. Rumball?" The voice sounded strangely familiar, but it was not until Jack was again seated in the carriage that he identified it.

"Why, that was little Jo.!" he exclaimed, aloud.

"Do you mean the driver?" inquired Ronaldson, opening his eyes.

"No, sir," returned Jack, somewhat stiffly, "some one I used to know." And he felt glad the banker had not seen the girl.

But Joanna! Who could have thought she would have grown so tall and fair? His pulses quickened as memory brought to his mind a hundred reminiscences of childhood in which she had always played the most important part. Would she have forgotten him and the old, delightful days when they married each other at least once a week, and sometimes oftener, if Jo. happened to be wearing a new ribbon or frock. Tomorrow he would go to the Gap directly after breakfast. What a lot he would have to hear and to tell! The banker, though, had other plans for Jack.

"There!" he exclaimed, presently, with a wave of his right hand, "there lies Broadshaw Moor! I hope you'll feel fit to be on it at five to-morrow morning sharp." And he looked his companion full in the face, while he closed a pocket-map of the county he had from time to time consulted.

Where breathes the young fellow whose heart does not beat the faster at the prospect of a day's shooting? Jack's fine eyes danced with joy at the suggestion. But to accept the invitation would be to give himself unconditionally into the hand of the enemy. Yet what had M. Vernet, to whom Jack had confided all that he knew concerning his birth, advised? "Meet your guardian with courtesy, assume nothing, above all do not let prejudice influence you. If he shows no disposition to explain things, it will be your duty, not only to require and demand an explanation, but to investigate matters for yourself."

As Jack rapidly recalled this counsel the banker rightly construed his silence. "Of course we have much to say to each other, but we have time before us. I haven't missed being on the moors on the twelfth for the past ten years, and with such weather it would

be criminal to miss sport. Our business can well wait till next week. Besides, I want to see how you shoot!"

And before Jack could offer any objection the elder man was deep in grouse-lore, and had skilfully inveigled his companion into a discussion of the respective merits of shooting over dogs, grouse-driving, muzzle and breech-loaders, until Heather's Edge came in sight with the Barnard sisters at the door.

"The twelfth" rose gloriously, and Ronaldson and Jack, accompanied by a youth and a retriever, were afoot for Broadshaw about 4.30 a.m. Although Jack had had no experience of English sport, he could not but rejoice in the exhilarating combination of good "heather, weather, and feather," and was soon deeply interested in the movements of all connected with "the drive." He made no attempt to shoot until he had well noted the methods and results of his uncle's firing. But when he made his first essay and brought down two birds flying parallel, the banker's delight—and he was an excellent shot—was unbounded.

"Well shot! Well shot!" he exclaimed. "I was afraid you meant having a go at 'the brown,' but you know what you're about, lad! I'm proud of you, indeed I am!"

And Jack, flushing under the combined praise and shoulder-patting, explained that during the past two summers he had had good practice in the Swiss mountains with a fowling-piece. He only made twenty shots after that brilliant one, but he had eleven brace of birds to carry away at half-past four, the banker five more.

"My word, Jack, you've made yourself the hero of the drive," said Ronaldson, as the two wended

their way back to Heather's Edge, the banker having declined the invitation of Lord Clan Falkland to dine with him that evening. "You'll outdo me long before the season's over."

Jack, however, declared himself distinctly averse to shooting from behind walls or batteries. He disliked the inaction of waiting for the birds, and was inclined to think "driving" cruel.

"Ah, well, I'll write to Lord Winthorpmere. I've no doubt he can give us two or three days stalking at his Highland place later on."

As a good shot and as a banker, always ready to oblige with a loan, as a "warm" man, a man, too, whose prescience in speculative business was acknowledged to be well-nigh infallible, Ronaldson, spite of his eccentric appearance, was a welcome addition to any shooting party, a persona grata everywhere.

But Jack made no response to this suggestion of future intimacy and companionship; and an indifferent observation respecting the birds he carried signalised his intention to hold himself aloof, at least, for the present, from anything conducive to such a position. And if this were the first, it was by no means the only reminder the elder man was destined to receive, that until he had made "a clean breast" of things to his nephew, there would be no bridging of the great gulf yawning between them.

"You are not going out again!" he cried, in surprised tones an hour or two later as, seated in the rustic summer-house in Heather's Edge garden enjoying his pipe, he caught sight of Jack with two brace of birds and walking stick in hand coming down the path.

"I'm going across to the Gap, sir. _I want to see

Mr. Davenant, and he will like a bird or two. The walk will do me good after standing all day."

"A mile to the moor, and a mile back, I should have thought would have satisfied you," returned the elder man, drily. "But take another brace. Davenant did you say? Is that the wood-carver?"

And having received an affirmative reply, the banker continued, "I want to see him about some work I've asked him to do. I've a great mind to come with you. How far is it?"

"Between four and five miles, sir." But Jack did not encourage the suggestion as to companionship, so the elder man shook his head at the distance, and if a sigh escaped him as the gate clicked behind his nephew it, doubtless, but emphasized the regret that filled his soul. Of course he, who had never associated himself with Jack's life, its pleasures, or its sorrows, he who had allowed the mystery attending the mother's marriage and death to alienate him from her son through baby and boyhood, was not in a position, now that son was of an age to think and act for himself, to requisition his companionship.

Nevertheless, he felt very sore, and did not disguise from himself that there was something aggressive in the young fellow's action in going off to-night without consulting his wishes on the matter. The outlook for the future was not very rosy; moreover, another difficulty presented itself as likely to prove a serious obstacle to the banker's scheme of adopting his nephew. Surely he was not on terms of intimacy with this wood-earver? Ronaldson had hoped that the long absence in Switzerland would have loosened, if not entirely destroyed, any ties Jack might have formed in childhood.

But here was Miss Barnard herself, with tumblers and spirit-stand. He could not do better than invite her to join him in a glass, and so lead her on to speak of the nature of Jack's friendship with this carver and others in the neighbourhood. He had been somewhat apprehensive that she would make unpleasant references, such as had made him wince and writhe in secret agony at his impotence to denounce and overthrow on that never-to-be-forgotten occasion of their former and only meeting.

He had arranged to see Jack here after much anxious thought, and was glad he had done so, for the young fellow's attitude of armed neutrality served to inform the banker that his assumption of that position was largely due to the representations, or misrepresentations, of the elder Miss Barnard. Evidently she was the bull, whom, on all accounts, it would be wise to take by the horns. As yet though, these instruments of offence and defence had not been allowed to appear; indeed the being who now bore the spirit-stand and its accompaniments to the summerhouse had nothing whatever in common with "a curly cornulated, bovine beast." She must, however, be completely won over to his side either by concealed or direct attack.

But to his astonishment Ronaldson found, when at his request the lady seated herself, that the enemy had capitulated unconditionally, and, furthermore, was prepared in future to fight openly under his banner. For Martha Barnard was too shrewd a woman to jeopardise her own interests, and if Jack were to be entirely removed from Heather's Edge, it would, so she silently reasoned, be only a graceful act on the part of the banker to remember the services of the sisters

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by an annual remittance. But Martha assured herself that this possibility had little, or nothing, to do with her gracious reception of the man she had delighted to make the target for Jack's boyish scorn and indignation.

Was he not now a reformed character, ready to acknowledge, albeit tardily, the child from whom he had so long and so wickedly held aloof? Was it not, therefore, a simple duty on her part to welcome his assumption of a position she had always declared for, and let bygones be bygones? Besides the near future promised her the post her soul loved dearly—namely, that of a petty (though that adjective was not hers) Providence in Jack's affairs.

Mary was busy with her watering-pot among the flowers and only the sound of voices reached her now and again. But as she paused for a moment enchained by the lovely iridescence of the billowy clouds above her, she heard Martha say as she was leaving the summer house, "If you'll take my advice, sir, you'll keep the young man as much as possible under your own eye while he's here. I won't say more."

And Mary recognised at once that her sister had assumed the part of "leading lady," and that whatever the drama might be, she would control the action of all the players in it.



CHAPTER VI.

Her face
Seemed a perpetual daybreak, and the woods
Where'er she rambled, echoed through their aisles
The music of a laugh so softly gay
That Spring with all her songsters and her songs
Knew nothing like it.

-SIR H. TAYLOR.

As Jack hurried along the road leading down to Friston-Boughton his mind was in a turmoil. Spite of M. Vernet's counsel, his burning sense of what he owed to himself and, in a still greater degree, to his mother's memory upbraided him with having truckled to the man he had been taught to regard as his mother's greatest enemy.

"'Write to your husband, ma'am,' I said to her, and down she sat at once, and wrote a note which she handed to me to head with the right address. 'Dearest Tom,' it commenced, and ended 'Always your loving Eleanor.' Wasn't that clear enough? And he never came anigh the funeral; never asked to see you, but sends his manager to bury her in the name of Jones! Jones indeed? A name the dear creature never once breathed. But that wasn't the worst even. This manager had the impudence to tell me that this Jones (a handy name enough) actually died before your mother set her foot in England to meet her husband. Bah! my blood boils when I think of it, and you, boy, if you're a true and worthy son will

see your mother righted. Bide your time though, keep a still tongue, and you'll be even with that deceiver yet!"

How plainly this oft-repeated story sounded in Jack's ears as he plodded on, and the recollection of it made his face flush as though he had been caught red-handed in some questionable action. He ought to have had no dealings whatever with this individual, who "wore his hair like our blessed Lord and the holy apostles," until he had either threshed things out with him or thrashed the creature himself. Moreover. the hints, pretty broad hints too, that this man had made now and again during the day about a future which Jack was to share with him had annoyed the young fellow extremely. In all pictures of the future-Jack had painted for himself, the banker had had no part, except as an enemy to be met and fought, conquered and put out of mind everlastingly.

Yet he had broken bread with him, though he was glad to remember his attitude had been unmistakably hostile. It was quite time though that the encounter took place. Davenant should know just what he intended to do, and Davenant would be sure to approve. But then Jack reminded himself that the carver in all probability knew little or nothing about this matter, which was of the highest importance in his, Jack's, Davenant was never one to trouble himself about other people's affairs, and Miss Barnard had expressly forbidden Jack in his childhood ever to speak of his father and mother to outsiders. When Martin Davenant came to settle in the district he accepted, without comment, the generally received statement of Miss Barnard, that she was boarding the little fellow at the request and expense of Mr. Ronaldson.

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the Hurstwick banker. So it would be necessary to tell everything from the beginning.

But as Jack unconsciously paused and leant against the grey-stone wall which fenced the Pass, the evening breeze, as it swept over the moor, and the enchanting view spread out before him, presented themselves as the proverbial oil and wine to heal and cheer his troubled mind.

Deep, deep down below him lay the long valley of the Derwent, widening westwards into dales of pastoral beauty, through which the silver stream, stained here and there with the reflected glances of the emerald meadows beside, and the billowy clouds above, made ever its royal progress. Right before the enchanted gazer lay Deem Moor, while in the far distant west the stern and sterile Kinderscout reared itself. By degrees loved haunts of long ago were recognised; spires and towers, villages nestling amidst their elms and beeches, glens within glens, glancing brooks, ripening cornfields all set in the deep amethyst of the abounding heather and canopied with the turquoise of the gods. What a scene it was! And there, right away to the left, was the tiny oak-spinney where Martin Davenant trained his wood; and perched a mile beyond, hanging in the cleft of the hill, was The Gap itself.

All Jack's distress vanished as he remembered whither he was bound, and resuming his walk with a quick, ringing step his recovered light-heartedness found voice in the refrain, "Le jour! le jour! le jour jait beau!" For did not Jo. live at The Gap?

At that moment she and her uncle were standing in the long, lean-to building attached to the south side of the cottage, and sacred to the two workers. A carver's bench ran from end to end, the windows so arranged that throughout the day light fell upon it. An oil-stone, with all the necessary tools and implements of a carver were ranged conveniently for use, while a large slate, mounted on an easel which could be raised or lowered at will, occupied the centre of the room. Upon the slate a rough, yet perfect, sketch of a female figure appeared, clad in somewhat outlandish garments and minus a face. Before it stood Davenant and Jo., the latter holding a piece of chalk in one hand, while the other rested on the shoulder of the carver, who had watched with interest and concealed admiration the ease with which the girl had sketched, from memory, this figure in early Norman costume.

With these two, work was always a serious matter, and for some time past Davenant had found his niece's suggestions of the greatest possible value to him.

"Don't you think, Dads, that as Miss Mellet* was such a very warlike being she ought to have the features of Mars? I think so, or, perhaps Minerva; at any rate, she must be totally different from all the rest in the group."

"She should be a little squarer in the body, mon enfant, that will take something from her height and give her a less girlish look," remarked Davenant, critically examining the sketch. "Those long, thick

^{*} Guarine de Meer, a branch of the House of Lorraine and an ancestor of the Lords Fitz-Warrine, repaired to the Peverils' place in the Peke, and there engaged with a son of the King of Scotland and also with a baron of Burgoyne; and, vanquishing them both, obtained the prize for which he fought, viz., Mellet, daughter of Pain Peveril (half-brother to William Peveril, natural son of the Conqueror), Lord of Whittington in the county of Salop.—Pillsington's View of Derbyshire.

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cables of ribbon-twisted hair will make a deeper relief, too, than I care for."

"Of course, you can make the cables, as you call them, as thin as you like, Dads," returned Jo., "but those are just the size of mine. Look!"

And even as she spoke her hair, from which she had withdrawn the supporting pins, fell to her feet, clothing her in a garment of ruddy gold which, threw back, caught and held the less golden rays of the sun as it stooped to the west. With a quick, deft movement Jo. had parted the wavy mass, and, again dividing it, twisted one-half cable-wise to show her uncle the exact distance it would stand out from the figure.

"I would rather have it drawn into one cable down the back," he remarked, musingly; "that would be better both for face and shoulder."

"But pig-tails weren't the fashion in England or Europe then," objected Jo., as Davenant turned to examine a large calf-bound volume of "Illustrated Costume" (the text in old French) which lay open on the bench.

The picture the girl made, clad in the shimmering, glancing, golden-red robe which seemed to have enveloped her as by magic, gave him a strangely sweet shock, thereby disclosing the hitherto unrecognised fact that the child he had loved and cherished ever since her birth in Old Picardie would very shortly be supplanted by a woman of rare grace and beauty.

To-day the child looked out at him from those lovely hare-bell eyes, but signs of the woman's advent were abundant; some touch from without or within and she would stand revealed, ready to enter upon the heritage of beauty with which Nature had so liberally

endowed her. And this conviction, as it deepened, saddened the carver, though he appeared to be wholly engrossed by the drawings on the page he was regarding.

Jo., pinning up her hair as she followed her uncle and as unconscious of his thoughts as of her own charms, her mind wholly given up to the business in hand, exclaimed, "You haven't decided about the face yet. I want you to have that blocked out before Mr. Ronaldson comes. Ah, I forgot. I did some things for you this morning when you were out. How do you like this and this?" as, having crossed to her own particular corner of the workshop, she handed Davenant two water-colour sketches under each of which appeared the words "Miss Mellet and the man of her choice, Guarine De Meer."

The drawing was faultless, the colouring perfect. That the girl had learned much from her uncle was not surprising, and what he was in wood she was in colours—a master-worker. The carved panels, crestings, sketches, designs, drawings in pencil, chalk or pigments which literally covered every inch of wall-space, and occupied every available square of flooring spoke, not only of the diligence and thoroughness of the workers, but of their marvellous sympathy.

And something more—that something the chosen one sees in gazing on a landscape or the heavens; the suggestion of loveliness greater, if less tangible than the loveliness manifest, the worker's ideal haunting the worker's portrayal of it. To dream out his work and then work out his dream had, from youth, been Davenant's ambition, and his influence upon his niece's work was very marked.

As he now took the proffered sketches from her

hand his eye fell first upon the inscription beneath the figures, and he remarked (as though trying to oust an unwelcome train of thought), "Ladies choose their husbands differently in these days."

"Choose their husbands?" echoed Jo., astonishment in her tones. "Why, women never choose them now. Oh, that reminds me, Dads," she continued with something like brusqueness, "I want to ask you a very particular question. It's time to put by work now, and we can have a lovely talk à deux before the bell rings."

As she spoke she gently closed the book on costume and took the sketches from Davenant's hand; then, slipping her arm within his, drew him to the bench and pulled him down beside her, turning her lovely eyes full upon him as if desirous of reading his very heart.

But the important question she had referred to remained unasked; and the carver, much amused by these preliminaries, noted her hesitation with provoking deliberation.

"Eh bien! Let us then hear this important—this question particulière. Est-ce une nouvelle robe, ou —?"

"Ah, tais-toi donc je vous prie!" interrupted the girl, with a pretty petulant movement. "Seest thou not, mon chéri, that it is an affaire bien sérieuse! I want to know," she continued, as she fidgetted with a button on her uncle's working blouse, "whether you wouldn't like to—Oh, dear! Voilà!" and the speaker broke off with a smothered sigh. "Cette affaire est certainment bien difficile d expliquer."

And the look the girl raised to the face of the man bending over and enjoying her confusion was so troubled that Davenant, smitten with compunction,

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apprehension, and sympathy, instantly exclaimed, in tones of tender remorse, "Qu' as tu donc, mignonne? Dis-le moi immédiatement!"

Now that the man's heart as well as ear had been gained, the girl no longer felt her self-imposed task so difficult. With a bewitching smile she placed a hand on each of her uncle's shoulders, saying, " Ecoutez! Je vais parler bien, bien rapidement! Dites-moiwouldn't you like "-here the speaker flung her face upon the breast of the astonished carver-"to-tomarry Miss Mary? Voilà, it is said!"

Then, as if realising to the full the extreme delicacy of the position in which she had placed her uncle, she raised her head, imprinted a kiss on his cheek, and then hid her flaming face upon his shoulder. "But, isn't it a splendid idea, Dads?" (Kiss.) "The more one thinks about it" (kiss)" the better it seems."

When at length released, Davenant had quite recovered his lost self-control, and with it his former mischievousness. Turning upon the half-frightened girl a very solemn look, he said, with feigned seriousness, "Since when, mademoiselle, have you decided to leave me? Who, I have at least the right to ask, is the man of your choice? And what date have you fixed pour les noces? Answer, without delay!"

For answer, Jo., at first misled by her uncle's manner, burst into a long, pealing laugh that rippled away and found an echo in every corner of the room now filled with the luminous beauty of the after-glow.

"Ah, mon chéri," she at length found breath to say, "mon chéri, but you are clever, very clever! I never thought of it like that. Me marry, indeed! Jamais! How you make me laugh! But mine was a serious thing, Dads; I meant what I said." And the 138

girl nodded her head in what she intended to be a convincing manner.

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Davenant nodded, too, an action which only provoked her (as he intended it) to enter into detail, and so furnish him with her views on this strange question, while his own might find shape and perhaps voice.

"No, it is bad of you to tease when I am in real earnest. Don't you think, now, it would be splendid for both of us if we could have Miss Mary here always? Well, we couldn't, you know, unless you married her. Oh, I've thought a lot about it, I assure you." And then, as she caught a lurking gleam of mischief in the eye of her apparently-interested listener, she broke off in mingled distress and annoyance. "Voilà! you laugh at me, just as if I didn't mean every word I am saying. I declare I'll never, never try again to make three people happy—never!"

"Three people?" queried Davenant, with every

appearance of mystification.

"Of course, three people—yourself first of all. You say so often to me that Marthe is too old, and I am too young to look after the house properly. Now what could be better than to have Miss Mary here, someone who would be nicer far than any housekeeper? A sweet, and clever woman, too, who loves your work and everything that is good and beautiful. Why, the wonder to me is that we have never thought of this before! I can't say how good it would be for me to have her here. She's just the very woman in the world I would like for my aunt. Fancy, Dads, I've never had a cousine, never in all my life; and when you are away dreaming on the heather I shall find it heavenly to talk and read with Mary; and Mary, cela va sans dire, will be much happier here,

where she would be loved and valued, than with that sister who bullies her so."

Jo.'s arguments for her case followed so quickly upon each other that Davenant found no opportunity either to combat or endorse them, and as she came suddenly to a full stop and discovered that the mischievous gleam had completely vanished from her listener's eye, she hoped he was at last seriously weighing her proposition.

"Do think of it, Dads, dear," she concluded, at the same time throwing her arms round his neck and

pressing her fair cheek against his dark one.

Just then a thundering knock startled them both, and before Jo. could move, the door was roughly opened and the fat young servant entered, carrying a handbell, and blurted out her errand in the unceremonious fashion peculiar to her.

"Eh, master, will you an' Miss Joanner please go an' wash yerselves d'reckly minute. The heart's

out o' the bell, yer see, so I can't ring it."

The speaker here exhibited that instrument minus its clapper, while Jo. exclaimed beneath her breath, "Cette fille me donne sur les nerfs!"

"Marthe's got what her calls the doolers," continued the unabashed maid, "you know what they be, Miss Joanner? An' if they ommerlettes is spoilt her'll have more doolers, an' her's got more now than's good for her, you may depend."

"Les douleurs? Oh, la pauvre Marthe!" exclaimed Jo. "You must be very good, then, Eliza. I'll

go and dress at once."

And the girl hurried away, knowing by experience the discomfort that always followed unpunctuality whenever *Marthe* was attacked by *les douleurs*.



The little household at The Gap was a well-ordered one, for the old French housekeeper, scrupulously neat and clean, insisted on meals being punctually served, and as Davenant and Jo. never thought of tasting food in their working garb, a first and second bell gave due warning of each approaching repast. But supper was always the festive meal, as was acknowledged by uncle and niece appearing then in festive attire. And Jo. never looked more lovely than on this August evening, when, at the sound of the reinstated clapper, she descended, and, to her great surprise and delight, found Jack Ronaldson as well as Davenant awaiting her at the entrance to the little salle à manger.



CHAPTER VII.

They have chang'd eyes, They are both in either's powers. But this swift business I must uneasy make.

-THE TEMPEST.

THAT night Martin Davenant scarcely closed his eyes. The question of marriage—his marriage—put forward as not merely possible but desirable by one who, next to himself and his selected bride, would be most nearly affected by it, proved an effectual barrier to slumber. Marriage, even in the days of his youth and early manhood had never any charm for him, rather had it appeared as a rock to be avoided if he would guide his craft into the haven of perfection where he would have it. And Circumstance had hitherto been singularly kind, promoting as well as fostering the man's one ambition, that of proving a worthy descendant of his long-ago ancestor the Arnold Boulin under whose skill and superintendence the wonderful choir in Amiens Cathedral had blossomed into fadeless beauty.

As he lay on his hard mattress this August night, his thoughts harked back to boyhood's days, and one by one he traced the epochs in his life, epochs which had their close in his advent to The Gap, when, as he had fondly hoped, an era of freedom to dream and work had dawned, and would know no setting until death.



Another epoch now loomed in the near future but, unlike its predecessors, it had been sprung suddenly upon him, and, so shrouded was it in the mists of the unknowable, he could not at once decide to accept or avoid it.

Yet why should he fear that Circumstance would be less kind now than of yore? She had given him first, not merely his ambition, but the opportunity for daily contemplation and study of his ancestor's work in the old cathedral; then, by the sale of the paternal farm, had provided means for his further study in England and other lands, and finally, had crowned her gifts by the bestowment of the little orphaned daughter of his English niece to brighten a life from which all other near relations had been taken.

To be freed from the fret of French politics, which at any moment might compel him to leave both the little Joanna and his work, to fight under the tricolour, Davenant left France when the child was six, and, attracted by the scenery and reposefulness of the Peak District, had established his little ménage at The Gap. An offer from an English firm to take all he could produce at his own figure gave him the opportunity he had always longed for—to dream out his work and work out his dream.

He had, without a doubt, dreamed though, when he should have been wide awake; he—he who loved her so devotedly—had forgotten Jo., had allowed her needs to be eclipsed, had even been unaware, until this very afternoon, that she was already upon the threshold of womanhood.

His own mother—Mdme. Davenant—would never have permitted a girl with Jo.'s face and carriage to go out alone, yet he had given no thought to the matter.

Then Davenant—hitherto wide-eyed and rigid—shuddered as he recalled young Jack's attitude this very night towards Jo.; the deference he had shown, as though he were in the presence of a queen; the veiled admiration and delight he had evinced. Even when the two had laughed almost uproariously over some amusing reminiscence, the young man had never presumed on the familiarity of their old camaraderie.

And Martin knew—for as a master-carver he understood the significance as well as the beauty of light and apparently, purposeless touches, knew without any manner of doubt that those two at the supper table had, albeit unconsciously, formed a design each on the heart of the other. The tools they had unwittingly made use of, light now, as his own veiners, would ere long be thrown aside for others capable of striking deep down to the very core of their being. Yet that possibility must be avoided at all costs.

This Mr. Ronaldson, the banker, was, without doubt, a very rich man, for only a rich man could afford such a screen as he had requested the carver to furnish. And that he was young Jack's uncle was certain—for he had mentioned he was coming to Heather's Edge to meet his nephew. This meant, in all probability that he had Jack's future in his hands, and that, again, meant that he would never countenance the marriage of Jack and Jo. And Jack had been well-educated, educated, no doubt, for his uncle's position, and destined to move in a very different social atmosphere.

Jo., too, had been well educated, and had natural endowments of which any girl might be proud, but Davenant was well aware that he himself had no social status. Indeed, what society was to be met with in

this sparsely-peopled district? And how could he, a bachelor, even had he wished so to do, entertain guests? Lord Clanfalkland would sometimes call in and have a look at what was being done in the atelier, and Mr. Cartwright had been a frequent visitor. But Cartwright was dead and, without affectation, Jo. might well say she was triste at times.

But to let Jack come and go as he used to in boyhood would be only to make Jo. happy for a time and unhappy, perhaps, for always. Personally, Martin liked Jack exceedingly and never better than to-night.

Then, what a handsome couple they would make! Pshaw! the idea of marriage for them must not for a moment be entertained. Nothing but trouble would come of it, trouble to all concerned. Martin sighed.

His only hope was that the banker would take his nephew away before any harm was done. Yet Jack had not spoken with anything like admiration of his uncle when Davenant had occasionally referred to him. And it would be a difficult matter to treat the lad with coolness. Martin saw that. He saw, too, that if he did so Jo. would be asking "Why?" She would want to know why Jack might not come when he liked—just as he did in the old days. It would never do to tell her his fears; she would probably laugh outright if he even hinted at them.

All the same, Davenant determined that for the present, Jack should only visit at The Gap by special invitation. If he were allowed to come when he liked, the banker—and undoubtedly Miss Martha—would be saying that the girl wanted to entrap the lad!

Poor Davenant! He had been roughly awakened from his dreamful existence this evening, not only to

the important fact that Jo. was on the verge of womanhood, but that her position there was fraught with danger which demanded immediate and delicate treatment. And, single-handed, he felt he should only bungle and increase the danger he was anxious to withdraw her from.

Only a woman, he at length decided, could manage this delicate business. A woman would understand a woman. At least, Mary would understand Jo., and would be able in some subtle way, to show her the necessity of making young Jack a very infrequent visitor. She would be a comfort to the girl as well as a chaperone. Besides, Jo. loved her, Jo. wanted her.

Then Davenant allowed himself to consider the girl's strange proposal, and the longer he considered it the more enamoured of it he became. As he weighed pro against con. the pro assumed such gracious proportions and wore such an attractive aspect, that, as the early blackbird whistled (before Chanticleer had spoken), Davenant registered a vow that he would waylay Miss Mary the next time she paid her weekly visit to the churchyard, and there and then put his fate to the test.

It struck him as somewhat ungallant that he shrank from going to Heather's Edge to ask the momentous question. But there he could not be sure of seeing Mary alone. Martha had always been present on the occasion of every visit he had ever paid to the cottage, and though Martin was a brave little man, he could not bring himself to propose to Mary while Miss Martha looked on. No, he would be wiser to see her in the churchyard on the coming Saturday—three days from now.

It almost took Davenant's breath away when he

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realised that in so short a space of time such a mighty change might have been effected. Then he recognised that he had unconsciously made up his mind on this question of marriage hours before; at the very moment, indeed, when Jack had intimated his desire to have a confidential talk with him as soon as possible. "Come on Sunday," the carver had replied. "I'm very busy just now—to-morrow I must go to Exmoor, and on Friday Jo. and I are going to Denby, and I don't suppose we shall return until the last train."

He would talk over things with Mary first. She would advise him, and not only so, she would be able to tell him something definite as to Jack's position, who his parents were, and what his prospects.

As for Jack, he had found Jo.'s beauty so bewildering, the mingling of English frankness and unconscious French coquetry so delightful that he had not taken Davenant's excuse to listen there and then to his confidences as anything remarkable until he was within a mile or so of Heather's Edge again. Then the remembrance of it struck him like a well-aimed blow, and he asked himself abruptly whether the carver intended to make a formal visitor of him. Were not the old glad days when he came and went to The Gap whenever he chose to be renewed? Would not Jo.'s companionship be available as of yore? Did the carver intend to dig a gulf between two such old friends as Jack and Jo.?

If such were his intentions Jack recognised that, in some way or other, the banker must be the cause of their formation. He recalled, too, that, when at supper he had spoken of his dislike to grouse-driving, Davenant had appeared to take it for granted that Mr. Ronaldson's wishes would be his first consideration.

It had not been possible, then, to explain matters; indeed, the carver gave him no opportunity for confidential talk. Certainly, there had been something in his manner; what it was Jack found a difficulty in defining—a reserve, a lack of cordiality, a sort of approach-me-not air which was unmistakeable.

Davenant must have got it into his head that he, Jack, would now be mixing with the banker and Lord Clanfalkland's friends. Then he must be made aware, without any manner of doubt, that for Jack there could never be any friends so loved and valued as those at The Gap. Why, in those far-off days of childhood, Jo. used to call herself his little wife! The very recollection of that speech, with all that its realisation signified, made the young heart beat faster, the young feet press more proudly the moorland path.

Not to be free to see Jo. whenever he liked, not to be permitted to resume the old, and now more than ever to be desired, companionship would be to take the sun from the heavens and darken all his days! Yet the old companionship would not suffice him now; he recognised in a moment that it could not.

If she would but listen to him, if she would stoop to link her life with his! And this cry of his heart, gathering strength and volume, filled his being, and broke away through the parted lips till it smote the far stars with its throbbing.

But Hope draws its breath and being from meditated action, and as it whispered of a happy future, it bid Jack in loud tones beware of compromising himself further with the banker. M. Vernet had told him he would be quite justified in making investigations for himself. Why should he not go to-morrow as

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far as Hurstwick and satisfy himself by an inspection of the church registers there as to whether Mr. Ronaldson had or had not a sister named Eleanor? To accompany that gentleman again to the drive would only be to enmesh himself with people he did not desire to know, people who would patronise Jo. and therefore could never be his friends.

His mind was made up; he had always been liberally supplied with pocket-money; he would leave an explanatory note for Mr. Ronaldson and be back at Heather's Edge either to-morrow night or Friday. Davenant seemed to be full of business. Friday he said would be spent at Denby, indeed, he had distinctly said, "Come on Sunday."

"Pretty plain speaking that," said Jack, sotto voce.
"Well, on all accounts I can't do better than go to Hurstwick to-morrow. I must have a name, as well as love and life to offer Jo."

Mr. Ronaldson, tired out with his long day, had gone to bed when Jack reached Heather's Edge, and had given orders for breakfast to be ready not earlier than eight o'clock. Miss Barnard was ashamed, she said, that he should have been left alone all the evening. Jack's duty was plain, he certainly had no call to go trapesing off to The Gap and keep folk sitting up till half-past ten.

"I'm sorry to have kept you up, Miss Martha, but there really was no reason why I should not have let myself in, and bolted the door as I have often done before."

"Well, I wished to speak to you. I never yet failed to tell you your duty, and though you may think you're now beyond being brought to task, I can assure you I don't. Sit down "—for Jack had taken up his

candlestick and was looking somewhat bored. "Well, if you won't sit down you must stand."

And then in a lower and persuasive voice the lady proceeded. "Take my advice, Jack, my advice is good, cultivate Mr. Ronaldson's company, and——"

"Look here, Miss Barnard," cried Jack, with scant politeness (who can study politeness when indignation has the bit in her teeth?), "if I do not love this man or his company, who but yourself is to blame? As soon as I could speak did you not teach me to say bad man' whenever his name was mentioned? And onwards from that time until I left for Switzerland have you not again and again laid it as a solemn obligation on my soul to call this man out and make him render an account of the wrongs done to my mother and me?"

"Hush, hush, Jack! I can't allow you to talk in this way. When I spoke to you of Mr. Ronaldson I spoke of a man who, whatever his relationship, had given you no sign of affection from your birth upwards. But now he is ready to give you not only affection but wealth, and when a man is ready to do his duty, and not only ready but anxious, it certainly ill becomes you not to meet him halfway and let bygones be bygones."

But all Jack said was "Good-night, Miss Barnard."

He was breakfasting with the sisters at six o'clock next morning, and on the conclusion of that meal requested Miss Martha to give Mr. Ronaldson the note he handed to her. But when he coolly announced that he would be absent all day and might not return till the morrow she was extremely indignant. She knew very well what he was after; no good, she was certain, would result from his having gone to The Gap. Mr. Davenant ought to know better than to

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encourage a young man in flouting his best friend. But it was easy to see "that girl" was at the bottom of this unaccountable behaviour.

At this discourteous reference to Jo. Jack rose from the table and strode into the kitchen for his boots. Martha was furious at this silent but obvious manifestation of his feelings, and, had she dared, would have appealed straightway to Mr. Ronaldson, but she feared to disturb him.

Mary, distressed and puzzled, and hoping he would give her some clue to his movements, accompanied Jack to the half-way elm and begged him to "do nothing rash." He told her she need have no fears on his account, but he was determined, he said, to have nothing further to do with Mr. Ronaldson until he gave him the explanations he ought to have given him on the night of his arrival.

"I've no wish to keep out of his way, Miss Mary, and he knows that very well. A few words from him, and I should know what to be at. But he puts me off till next week and that looks bad. I can see his object clearly enough! He wants to mix me up with these 'big' folk at the drive, to introduce me as his adopted son, and so on; and then, when he has made these public announcements, then he will tell me what I ought to have known long ago. But he'll find I'm no chicken, that I have a will of my own, and that I mean to exercise it. Why, he made more than one reference at dinner last evening to my going to live with him at Hurstwick! The idea! I wouldn't live with him if I had to choose between him and the workhouse!"

"Hush, hush, dear! Remember he has brought you up, and educated you," ventured Mary.

"With whose money, though; that's what I want to know, and mean to know," interrupted the young "What does he think I'm made of, fellow, fiercely. I wonder. India-rubber, or calf's foot jelly, warranted to fit into and fill any mould he may choose to order! All these years, nearly twenty, he never troubles himself to set eyes on me, and then, when at last he has made up his mind to try to repair his neglect, instead of at once explaining it, he puts me off with an excuse that he wants to shoot. Shoot for sooth! He can never have loved my mother, Miss Mary, never! or he would know something of my feelings. But as he wants to shoot, let him shoot. Meanwhile, I'm going to keep out of his way, for I've no wish to interfere with his pleasures."

Then, in quieter tones, as Mary paused preparatory to turning back, the young man said, "I shall be all right, never fear. Expect me to-morrow afternoon, if not to-night. I want us to go together to some of the old haunts."

"There, sir," exclaimed Miss Barnard, an hour or so later, "your nephew's gone the Lord knows where. I never came anigh such audacious independence. But you may be pretty sure The Gap people have influenced him. Tried to turn him against you, I make no doubt. As like as not he arranged to take the girl I told you about somewhere to-day. She's one of those dressy creatures (I haven't spoken to her for twelve months or more) that, as the saying goes, would wheedle the wheel off a wheel-barrow. She's French blood in her veins, sir, and you know what that means!"

As her listener looked the ignorance he felt Miss-Barnard proceeded to enlighten him or explain hemelf.



"It means for one thing, sir, that she can put her clothes on more as if she were a countess born, than a girl with scarce twenty shillings a year to call her own. And it's that sort of thing that is the undoing of young men in these days. I make no doubt she's laid her traps well, and is with him at this moment."

Her listener was evidently impressed by the plausibility of Miss Martha's reasoning. Jack had certainly evinced a great desire to see this girl; he would scarcely have taken a nine miles walk last night on the offchance of finding the carver at home.

Ronaldson's annoyance at his nephew's unlooked for independence was, however, trifling in comparison with his distress at the prospect of the ignominious failure of all his plans for the young man's benefit. When he had proposed to postpone all business matters until the coming week, he had had a double purpose in view. He hoped during the intervening days, when they were together on the moor, that each would come to know and esteem the other; while Jack would be thrown into the society the banker desired. Lord Clanfalkland's lady visitors were to have unched with the shooters to-day. And Miss Barnard was telling him that the young fellow was liable to be entangled by a girl with French blood in her veins!

Recognising, however, his own culpability in having weakly evaded his duty towards his orphaned nephew in the past, he was the more lenient in his judgment of Jack's conduct.

"I can't altogether blame the chap," he said, "for keeping away from me. I asked him to wait till next week for any explanations he might desire, as well as for the proposition I have to make for his future. When we have had our talk we shall no

doubt be better friends, or rather I should say, good friends. His note is really very courteous; he will hold himself in readiness for the interview at whatever time and day I choose to name. In the meanwhile, he has some business matter he wishes to execute, so may be absent for six-and-thirty hours or so. No, no, let him alone. He is a man of his word, or he would not be my sister's son. He will be back to-morrow as he promises. And now I must be off, Miss Barnard. Should I not be returning for dinner, Morris shall bring you word by five o'clock. My present intention is to accept Lord Clanfalkland's invitation to spend the night at the Grange, but I shall certainly be with you again to-morrow night."

And hiding his annoyance under an assumed cheerfulness, Ronaldson set out for the grouse-drive.

"Well enough he may stay away for his dinner," remarked Martha Barnard, as she watched her boarder as far as the half-way elm: "He'll have good company at The Grange, but lor' me, how can the man abide that hair upon him? It makes me feel all creepy crawly to see it rise and fall in the wind!"

And Ronaldson at the same moment was denouncing his folly in not having had these same curling locks shorn before he came near Heather's Edge. What earthly good had they accomplished?



CHAPTER VIII.

"Overhead bends the blue sky dewy and soft, and radiant with innumerable stars like the inverted bell of some blue-flower sprinkled with golden dust and breathy fragrance."

JACK returned to Heather's Edge on the afternoon of Friday to find Miss Martha away, making purchases in Denby, and Mr. Ronaldson the guest of Lord Clanfalkland.

"Let us go and have a chat with old Ann Vigors, Miss Mary, when we've had tea, then I can tell you my news." So, leaving a message with Bridget (who had been in service with the sisters for the past three-and-twenty years), Mary and Jack set out in the cool of the evening just as Martha came in sight at the half-way elm.

But they were bound for a hill behind the house, so did not come in contact with that lady, who would doubtless have detained them until her curiosity respecting the young man's absence had been satisfied. Mary asked no questions, for if Jack's absence had anything to do with Jo., as Martha averred, she would rather not be his confidante. Her astonishment, though, equalled her relief when he told her he had been to Hurstwick, and had proved from the registers of St. Mary's Church that his mother was Mr. Ronaldson's sister.

"God be praised," was Mary's fervent rejoinder. "Now you must put away all the prejudice you have

nurtured against him for so long and give him the opportunity of explaining himself."

"You know I am only longing for him to do so. It is he who has put off the day of explanations, and why or wherefore, I cannot for the life of me conceive."

"Tell me all you did yesterday; how you went to work I mean. When you were born Hurstwick was too far off for us to make enquiries, even had Martha thought well to do so. There was no railway then; but I suppose you would not be more than two or three hours getting there?"

"It is rather a roundabout road, now," returned Jack, "and with changes and waits, it takes a good four hours to reach Hurstwick. But I'll tell you what I did. It was close on twelve when I arrived yesterday, and I inquired at once for the vicarage. It is a sleepy place, is Hurstwick, but just such a town, Miss Mary, as you would like; full of quaint gabled houses, and with so little stir in it you would think it had just been unpacked from a sixteenth-century band-box."

"And did you have any trouble in getting to see the registers?"

"Not much; the awkward part of it was giving my name to the vicar. I wouldn't give 'Ronaldson' for more reasons than one. It really isn't my name. Well, I gave the name of Jones, and begged permission to see the register for the year 1820. I said I wished to verify a birth, but gave no name, for, of course, I did not know whether my mother was a Ronaldson or not. I know, however, the year of her birth, for you had told me she was twenty-seven when she died."

"And you found the entry in that year?" questioned Mary, eagerly.

"Yes; there it was, 'Eleanor Gavin Ronaldson,



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daughter of Thomas and Eleanor Ronaldson, of The Bank, Hurstwick.' I can tell you I thanked God when my eyes fell upon it. Then I looked back and discovered my uncle's name. He was born in 1819 about eighteen months before my mother. There were tombs of the Ronaldson family in the church, and tablets on the walls bearing their names as far back as 1680; and may be there were Ronaldsons before that date, but St. Mary's, or rather the greater part of it, was burnt down in 1660. now I must tell you something that makes my heart warm towards my uncle. Of course, I did not appear to take any special interest in the Ronaldson family, but I managed to set the cicerone—a curious old fellow he was—talking about them. He shook his head regretfully when telling me that the family would die out with this Mr. Ronaldson, my uncle. And by a skilful question I got him to speak of my mother. She was a beautiful woman, he said, but perhaps a bit headstrong, though not given to frivolity like some. As for offers of marriage, she'd had them by the score, but she wouldn't leave her brother, 'they two thought all the world of each other.' So that speaks well for my uncle."

"But didn't the man know anything about her death?" questioned Mary, her interest growing in intensity.

"No; he had heard that 'the poor thing died abroad somewhere'; there was some talk too, 'a many years ago,' about her having married a clergyman—but he never heard 'the truth on it.' Anyway the banker had never been the same man since, and that was why he wore his hair hanging down his back."

"But that is not true, Jack; Mr. Ronaldson's hair

was on his shoulders when he came to fetch your mother away," interrupted Mary.

"Yes, I know, and he will have to explain why. But I can't help hoping he will come out all right. Ah, here we are. Now I trust Ann Vigors won't send us into fits. Perhaps age will have made her dull."

"I don't think it has changed her, she will always be peculiar; but pray don't encourage her to be silly, Jack."

The companions had entered a small spinney, at the other end of which, almost overshadowed by pine trees, stood an insignificant-looking stone cottage—the abode of Ann Vigors. At sight of it Jack's innate love of teasing assumed temporary sovereignty over his deeper feelings, and during the next half hour a stranger might justly have surmised that he had not a care in the world.

The door, standing partially open, gave the visitors silent welcome, but though the sound of a human voice was heard from the adjoining, and only other, room no one was visible. A minute later the inner door was opened, and a little shrivelled woman, with a half-dazed look upon her countenance, appeared. She barely recognised Miss Mary before commencing an apology, which was conveyed in very rapid tones.

"You'll excuse me, though, Miss Mary Barnard," she continued, "when I tell you I was at me prayers. Yes, sir, me prayers," and the little creature addressed her last remark in answer to Jack's look of inquiry, nodding her head to emphasise her assertion.

"In general," she proceeded, at the same time dangling her spectacles from her right hand and swinging her shoulders from side to side in a leisurely way, which contrasted strangely with her rapid enunciation, "I

don't say 'em so early, but I've had a passel from me son in Lunnon."

Here the speaker paused to judge the effect of this weighty communication, and as her hearers appeared suitably impressed by it, she continued, "I never let nothin' interfere wi' me thanksgivin' prayer. summat 'ud sure to go wrong if I did. But sit ye down, please."

And, having offered the only chairs she possessed, the old lady stood with hands clasped meekly before her.

"That's very good and proper of you, Ann," remarked Jack, as he insisted upon her occupying one of the chairs. "Very good. Upon my word, it isn't everybody who says 'thank you,' nowadays."

"Ah, it's not just a mere—so to say—ha'penny thank you as satisfies me," returned Ann. "I makes a p'int o' sayin' the w'ole prayer ev'ry time I gets

anythin' give me."

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"You don't say so, Ann?" And Jack's tones were nothing if not sceptical. "I don't profess to know to what length even ordinary gratitude extends; but you wouldn't do that—I mean, you would never be so extravagantly grateful as to repeat that thanksgiving prayer, let us say, twice in one half-hour?" and the scepticism in his tones was more pronounced than ever. "That would be too much to expect," he concluded, while Mary tried in vain to catch his eye, and frustrate his evident intention to make fun of what promised to be a sacred business.

"Not from me, sir," returned the little creature, nodding her head vigorously at her questioner, who seemed to exercise some fascination for her, her birdlike eyes following his every movement, while Mary's presence was quite ignored.

"You astonish me, Ann. I should hardly have thought there had been so much gratitude in the country. For my own part," he continued, from his standpoint in front of a large fire, "I'm not in favour of the exhibition of gratitude on anything like such a large scale. When gratitude becomes colossal, it becomes depressing. Indeed, and I think you will agreed with me, Ann, to my mind, abnormal gratitude exercises a deteriorating influence on the individual fibre, so to say, a weakening, enervating effect on the moral—er—well—er—you understand what I mean. Ahem! Ahem!"

And Jack was compelled to simulate a violent fit of coughing, for the small creature's eyes were fastened on him, and for some moments he had suffered agonies in his endeavour to control his facial muscles.

But the bird-like eyes gave him no chance either of concealment or escape, and now watched with unabated interest the visible tokens of chest-derangement on exhibition. After another prolonged ahem, Jack remarked, with every appearance of relief, "That's better, the dust gets into one's throat so. Now to return to what we were saying about gratitude, Ann" (for the hungry eyes were still fastened on him). "Did I understand you to say that you would actually repeat your thanksgiving prayer twice in one half-hour if occasion offered.?"

"In coorse I should, sir. I've never called meself a scholard, sir, but them two prayers, 'Our Father which are in 'evven,' and me thanksgivin', I've said so regler that I've never forgot 'em."

"That's very praiseworthy, Ann, very," observed the young man, delighted to keep the old lady's expectations on tenter-hooks a little longer. "You

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see I've been away from these parts for several years—oh, you wouldn't remember me, I'm sure—but I shall never cease to remember you, my memory perhaps being on a par with your gratitude. A moment, Miss Mary," for Mary here intimated that they must be going. "As I was saying, Ann, any exhibition of gratitude beyond what you so felicitously style 'a mere ha'penny thank you' is quite a novelty to me. Yet believe me" (and here the young man slid the fingers of his right hand to his waistcoat pocket, an action followed with breathless eagerness by his fascinated listener) "if you will do me the honour to accept this half-crown I shall think not one whit less highly of you if your gratitude takes the mere 'ha'penny form' of expression."

But as soon as Ann's fingers closed over the silver she rose to her feet, and making a low "bob" vanished into the next room, the door of which (as her honour was now at stake) she left wide open. Falling on her knees by the bedside she proceeded in a highly-pitched voice to recite her "thanksgiving prayer," and well it was for both her hearers that the speaker's eyes were fast shut. As for Jack, his feelings so overcame him after listening to the opening words of the invocation, that he was fain to retreat outside the cottage on tiptoe with handkerchief well-stuffed into his mouth; and Mary was almost equally affected, so unprepared was she for the style of expressing gratitude adopted by Ann Vigors.

"Let" (so the prayer [?] commenced).

Let dogs delight to bark and bite,
For God has made them so;
Let bears and lions growl and fight,
For 'tis their nature to.

Then followed another stanza, which recorded the questionable statement that "Birds in their little nests agree," but an unexpected diversion was caused by Miss Mary.

To conceal her emotion the better she had risen from her chair, intending to stand at the door of the cottage, but not choosing her way in the gloom, and forgetting to stoop, her bonnet struck against an ill-secured piece of bacon depending from the ceiling. This came down with an alarming noise on to the table, from whence it bounded to the floor. In the confusion that followed, the visitors recovered voice and some measure of seriousness, but Jack had his laugh out before they were many yards away.

Then it all at once occurred to him that Martin Davenant had said that he and Jo. would be returning from Denby by the last train to-night. Why not go round then by Gladford Rise Station on the mere chance of seeing them? The possibility was quite sufficient to decide the young man, and chatting gaily of Ann Vigors he deliberately ignored the turn

which led direct to Heather's Edge cottage.

As for Mary, though she knew the vanished sun had stolen the bright tints of the heather, and that the bracken had exchanged its day-garb of forest green for an outfit of funereal blackness, she gave no heed to her ways, all her thoughts concentrated upon her companion.

Could it, indeed, be true, she was asking herself, as Jack swung along beside her, his every movement one of unconscious grace, that this young giant was once the baby child who had lain and wailed in her arms nearly twenty years ago? Though the boy was still alive, as a hundred little words and ways abundantly

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proclaimed, the man had assumed the command, and was even at this moment (and Mary as she listened to his outpouring unconsciously trembled) contemplating that change which, more than any other, cuts off youth from manhood.

The pedestrians were now well on their way to Gladford Rise Station, and there were no landmarks which might serve to call attention to the change of route. Twilight had long since fallen, and away on the high land skirting the moor, an air of desolation reigned that made companionship pleasant if not desirable. It was, indeed, the very hour and whereabouts for confidences, and Jack was not slow to recognise this opportunity of speaking of his love which, like the vast expanse of moor around, seemed limitless, and in its purity but little removed from the stooping blue that canopied the friends.

Mary uttered no word as, in tones which proclaimed the intensity of the speaker's feeling, Jack poured forth the story of his love for Jo., and his determination to win her.

"Please God we will live out our lives together," he concluded, and the throb in his voice made Mary wince, for she thought of Martha and the mischief she was brewing.

"On Sunday," continued Jack speaking now with less tension, "I shall tell Davenant. Do you think I have any chance, Miss Mary?" and the tones were eager and humble. "I thought he seemed rather stiff with me the other night. It might have been my fancy, but he put me off when I told him I wanted to have a talk with him, and he never did that before. I used to come and go as I liked in the old days."

"You were a boy then," explained Mary, "now

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you are a man, and naturally he would wish to treat you as such."

"I hope he will."

"But, Jack dear," continued Mary, hesitatingly, anxious to give the young fellow a hint that Mr. Ronaldson might not approve of his choice. She, however, had no opportunity of saying more for, as they turned a bend of the road, Jack exclaimed with delight, "Pardonne, Miss Mary, but here come Jo. and Mr. Davenant!"

CHAPTER IX.

Two truths are common to lofty and affectionate natures. One is extreme susceptibility to other people's opinions, the other is extreme bitterness when those opinions are unjust.

MARIE BASHKIRTSEFF.

"But where are we?" rejoined Mary, coming at once to a standstill, and looking about her. "You don't mean to say Jack that you have let me pass Heather's Edge turn? How could you do so? We shall be another hour getting home!"

But before she could hear Jack's excuse (if he had one to offer) Jo., with a lovely flush on her face, was kissing her, French fashion, on both cheeks.

"You haven't been to The Gap I hope?" she exclaimed. "That would be too vexatious, and Jack knew we were to be in Denby all day, he ought to have told you!"

While Mary and Jo. cast reproachful glances at the young man, he turned from Davenant and, apparently having heard nothing, the girl was saying, greeted her with unaffected delight.

"This is a happy chance!" he said, as he raised his cap again. "Miss Mary and I have been up to see Ann Vigors, and I really find her more amusing than ever."

"Why, what has she been doing or saying now," asked Jo., with manifest interest as Jack turned in the direction of The Gap, and the two walked

forward, leaving their elders stationary. "I find our Eliza," she continued, "quite as much as my risibles will stand. *Vraiment*, she is really too fatiguing at times."

But conversation and progress were shortly arrested

by the voice of Miss Mary.

"Come, come, Jack," she cried, "we must get back at once; the field path just below will be our nearest. I had no idea Mr. Davenant," and she turned again to the carver, "that we were so far from home. No, no, dear," for Jo. was again at her friend's side, "it would take us quite half an hour longer to walk back to the turn. As it is Martha will be getting anxious. You are coming as usual to the church to-morrow evening? Oh, I am sorry, dear," she concluded, as the girl looked reproachfully at her.

"Ca m'est egal," returned the latter, good-naturedly; Jack would know on Sunday, if not before, about

her organ playing.

And the girl, having completely forgotten the remarkable request she had made to her uncle only two evenings before, had no suspicion that, in the few words he and Miss Mary had but just now interchanged, the second step towards establishing Miss Mary at The Gap had been taken. Two days ago, to her young eyes, life was a small, reposeful picture in which sober tints abounded, and its highest light the possible conversion of her only friend to the position of her uncle's wife.

To-day life was a huge kaleidoscope, full of surprising combinations from which rich colours refracted light and beauty in the most charming manner, and at wholly unexpected moments. And she, in the unconscious eagerness with which she watched for some fresh arrangement of hues and facets, had entirely lost sight of the small, reposeful picture, high lights and all.

"I shall be coming to the churchyard to-morrow, Miss Mary," chimed in Jack, anxious to delay the farewells Mary was endeavouring to hasten. When at length he caught her up (for she would not wait for him) he found her disinclined for conversation, and respecting her silence, fell to contemplating anew Jo.'s many and wonderful charms. He was bound to confess that she did not as yet regard him in the light of a possible lover. No, there was nothing but the old camaraderie in her manner, nothing of self-consciousness either in look or speech. But her very naturalness was adorable! Surely she must know that to look upon her was to love her! Soon he would make her understand what she was to him. thought the carver already understood, for he had seemed none too cordial to-night. But on Sunday Davenant should know of his love for Jo., and his plans for her happiness.

All at once Jack's brow darkened; Davenant might not care for this beautiful and accomplished girl to marry one whose birth was surrounded by mystery. But surely that would be dispelled when once he could have speech with Mr. Ronaldson. He had already proved one of Miss Martha's assumptions to have been utterly false, might he not hope that the Jones, whose right to the title of his father that lady had always flouted, was in very deed his mother's husband? Yet, if so, why make a mystery of it? Why, indeed, if he so fondly loved her, as the old verger had said, why had the banker neglected his sister's child, leaving him for just twenty years to the chance affection and influence of strangers, strangers for the most

part, too, in a rank of life lower than her own? What would Mr. Ronaldson reply when these questions were put to him?

Surely, surely it could not be that he had permitted a cloud to rest upon himself, in order to shield that loved sister's memory from the breath of scandal? And this Jones, had he been brought forward for the same purpose—a dead man—one, therefore, who could neither attest nor deny any statement concerning himself. This mystery promised to be a manyheaded dragon, which a visit to Hurstwick, and an inspection of the register of St. Mary's, were ineffectual to enfeeble, much less to destroy. Yet, as he strode forward in the dusk of this August night, Jack told himself he would never, never, never believe anything but good of that sweet mother, whom Miss Mary had described so often, and so graphically, that she was enshrined in his heart as the perfection of motherhood, the purest and loveliest of all womankind.

And again the old suspicion of, and resentment against, the banker surged in the young man's heart, and filled it with bitterness. Why had he postponed explanations? Was he afraid to speak even after twenty years?

On Monday morning though, he had promised an interview, then he should be brought to book; no subterfuges would avail, Jack would insist upon a clear Yea or Nay to the searching questions he had already, and most carefully, drawn up. That long, wavy hair, what was the meaning of it? Certainly it was not the outward visible sign of grief at his sister's death, nothing of the sort. But the day of reckoning was at hand. And to-morrow and Sunday was he not to see Jo. "

Mary's thoughts, meanwhile, at first wholly occupied in the pleasant task of conjecturing what Martin could possibly have to say to her when she went down as usual to the churchyard to-morrow, were now wholly of Martha and her probable attitude when she heard of the coming interview. For, of course, Mary would tell her of it; not to do so would have seemed like deception, and would at once have lowered the prospective pleasure to an ignoble level in the eyes of this singularly transparent woman. But in all probability Martha would know beforehand (for Martha's intuitions were almost diabolic) that she and Jack had met Martin and Jo. If so, there was a bad quarter of an hour awaiting Mary, and her sensitive nature shrank, as a timid child shrinks from a prospective whipping.

Martha, by that wonderful compulsion (which, in some organisations is nothing less than a sixth sense), had in bygone years so traded upon her sister's unquestioning affection that the girl's impulses and motives were as truly visible to her in their workings as were the fingers which held her knitting, and from time to time produced now a stocking, now a muffler. Mary was almost middle-aged when she awoke to the distressing knowledge that the idolised Martha's qualities were not the pure gold she had assumed them to be, but were largely, very largely, made up of gilded clay.

When, in some degree, she had learned to fathom her half-sister's motives, she knew herself powerless to combat them. The confidences, that in the days of her blind affection she had given so unquestioningly, were but too often used to wound her, for as Martha grew older she demanded not merely more, but all the love Mary's nature was capable of producing.

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Mary, with her firm belief in Providence, had never made the slightest effort to ingratiate herself with any male being; to do so Martha had often told her was both immodest and wicked. If God wished her to marry, He would bring her face to face with the man she would call husband. But in her young days she little knew how often Martha had supplanted Providence, and on more than one occasion had quietly hinted to a would-be suitor that his attentions would be unwelcome to their object.

"There's eleven!" said Jack, for the sound of eleven strokes from the deep-toned grandfather's clock thrilled upon the air, and roused him from his reverie, as he and his companion reached the half-way elm, and hurried forward. On their entry Miss Barnard curtly ordered Jack to go into the parlour, take his supper, and be off to bed.

Following Mary into the keeping-room, she remarked in her most sarcastic tones, "A pretty time of night this! But, of course, you've been detained with dear Jo. and dear Mr. Davenant!"

"I'm very much annoyed to be so late," returned Mary, cheerfully. "I can't think how we both happened to miss the turn. We were close to the field-path before I had any idea we were near it. Jo. and Mr. Davenant had come in by the last train. I suppose you would see them in Denby?"

"I saw them, but took good care they shouldn't see me. I don't run out of shops after them, neither do I say that I'm walking to Gladford Rise when I intend to go round by the station in the hope that I may meet people I ought to avoid. I'm thankful to say I have a little self-respect and some regard for gossipping tongues."

"This is very unkind, sister," returned Mary, who would have been wiser to have held her tongue (though in Martha's present mood that would have been all but impossible). "I did not know that Mr. Davenant and Jo. were to be in Denby to-day, nor that they were returning by the last train to-night."

"But you can't deny that Jack knew all their movements? When Bridget told me you had gone to Gladford Rise, I was pretty certain you would come back by the station in the hope of getting a glimpse of your friend Martin Davenant, who cares about as much for you as he cares for me, and that is just that." And the irate woman snapped her fingers noisily.

"Hush, sister," said Mary, with unlooked-for firmness. "We were not five minutes in their company, and you are welcome to know every word Mr. Davenant said to me. He merely asked if I would give him half-an-hour to-morrow when I go down to the churchyard. I fancy he wants to ask my advice about some trifle he may wish to buy for Jo."

The two were now seated at the supper-table, and for a long moment after Mary had made the foregoing statement there was an awful silence emphasized by a look of annihilation and wrath from Martha.

"Well?" said the latter, at length, as though willing to hear anything of an extenuating nature before opening the storm vials.

Suddenly realising what her candour would cost, Mary remarked with assumed calmness, "There is nothing more. I said I should be there, and if he liked to walk back with me I should be pleased, or ready or willing (I can't remember exactly which word I used) to hear what he had to say."

"Do you mean to tell me that you have actually arranged to meet a man in the churchyard?" Martha would have shrieked out the words had she not feared to arouse the banker, who had been in bed for an hour or more; but her tones were none the less cruel because they were drawn from the depth instead of the height of the register.

"How dare you think of making this appointment?" she continued, anger and jealousy rapidly gaining complete mastery over her, while a lurid light beamed from her eyes. "If he thinks he's going to arrange matters with you about Joanna and Jack, he's very much mistaken. I am the elder. I am the person to be spoken to; I am the head of this house and you, if you had the slightest sense of what is due to my position, to say nothing of your own, would have referred him to me. You have a home, haven't you? A home you have to thank me for! I'm ashamed of you! Where's your self-respect, I should like to know? Most women keep a little of that commodity in stock. Why didn't you say, as any female with a grain of sense would have said, 'I shall be at home, Mr. Davenant, from two till five, and my sister will make you very welcome if you will call.' Why didn't you say so? Answer me!"

"Well, I didn't say so, sister," returned Mary, who with flushed face was making a miserable pretence to eat, "because it did not occur to me to do so. It is a long walk from The Gap here, and Mr. Davenant is particularly busy just now. Why, then, should I trouble him to come all this way, when I must go as far as the church? Oh dear, oh dear, what a fuss to make over nothing at all!"

"Ah," ejaculated Martha, and getting up from her

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chair she snarled like a vicious dog in her sister's ear, "You know all about him and his business, do you? But let me tell you you'll have to answer to Mr. Ronaldson for taking Jack into such company. You were warned to keep those two apart. Davenant shall be told his duty though, I'll go myself to-morrow! I'll see him! If he wants advice I'll give it. Oh, he shall have advice, I promise you, the very best. Keep still!"

For Mary had risen, and though careful to repress all signs of fear, she was always nervous when Martha had one of these moods, and gladly remembered that Jack was not far off.

"I'm going to bed sister," she said, with all the calmness she could muster. If she displayed any heat she felt the consequences might be serious. Yet it was a hard matter to keep from retaliating.

"You'll wait and hear what I have to say," were the words literally growled out by Martha. "If you will act foolishly and wickedly you shall never have it in your power to say I stood by, and never opened my lips to prevent you. You've met him before at the churchyard? Oh, it's of no use to deny it," for Mary had closed her lips firmly. She would not degrade herself by contradicting. "What a fool I've been to let this sort of thing go on," continued Martha, in a more natural tone of voice. "I can understand now why you've been so regular in going each Saturday almost to the minute. But Mary Barnard, I had not thought you capable of such deception."

"What I think well to do that I shall do," remarked Mary, as she reached for her gloves and parasol. Clearly this scene would extend to the small hours of the morning if she listened any longer to Martha's rhodomontade.

"You'll only be sorry once for the way you are acting," asserted the elder, her mood at once transformed by Mary's unusual self-assertiveness. And then true to her practice of endeavouring to show some raison d'être for her outburst, she continued, with a break in her voice (which in similar circumstances had always proved her most effective field-piece), "I've been as a mother to you all these years, and while I can shield you I will. Therefore, I go with you to the churchyard to-morrow."

And seeing Mary was ready to object, she proceeded to furnish reasons.

"There can or should be nothing that Davenant, or any other man, can have to say to you—a woman of your age—that I should not hear. I know I'm right, and you won't pass twenty-four hours without saying so.'

Having thus bolstered her pride and jealousy with the phantom idea that she was merely desirous of doing what was convenable and even kind, Martha Barnard was her ordinary self again, except for an almost imperceptible nervous trembling.

"Come, kiss me now and go to bed, as you say. After a night's rest you will own my advice is the best. As for Davenant, he will respect you much more for refusing to see him in this clandestine manner. Now, don't interrupt, and don't get angry. It would be clandestine. Mind you, if he wanted to marry you I should never offer the least objection," she concluded, her voice betraying the acidity of her feeling on such a remote possibility.

Mary, whose sense of delicacy had suffered outrage, whose most cherished imaginings had been so ruthlessly

violated, was tethered during the whole of the foregoing harangue by Martha's strong grasp of her arm. Her anger was too fierce for words; inwardly and outwardly she writhed at her position and welcomed as an angel's call the voice of Jack at the door, saying "May I come in?"

He had recognised on their entry that Miss Mary would be subjected to a fierce fire (for he had not forgotten similar scenes in boyhood's days), and, thinking that he might create a diversion in her favour, he was prepared to take the whole blame of their late arrival upon himself. But his excuses were received with scant courtesy, and he was requested to go to bed at once.

Mary, as soon as her sister's grasp slackened, escaped to her room, where she fell to weeping uncontrollably, so unstrung and overwrought was she by the late encounter. Any gratification she had permitted herself to derive from the prospect of being of some slight service to the carver, had been roughly dissipated by Martha's terrible words and the way she insisted upon regarding an act that, to Mary, appeared entirely straightforward and lacking in all sentiment but that of ordinary esteem.

How was it that Martha would never permit her to feel herself of use? Why should she persist in treating her as a child incapable of judgment? If Mary's advice was ever requested, Martha always managed to forestall it, or give the idea that Mary knew nothing about the subject it was required to aid.

"Oh, Martha! Martha!" she cried, with the silent, heaven-opening voice of her heart. "I have loved you so, why cannot you look through my eyes sometimes?"

Martha, who could have made life so beautiful, and who did so when her own supremacy was preserved and acknowledged, was, when that supremacy was even lightly invaded, scarcely human. And as Mary reviewed the ability with which her sister turned circumstance, and dressed up her unlovely and harassing ways in the garb of principle and virtue, her soul was heavy with the awe and loathing that filled it.

But why, she asked herself, should she submit to these outbursts? Why not leave Heather's Edge altogether and let Martha reign there without a rival? Yet where could she go? Their friends were few, and they, of course, chiefly Martha's; relatives they had none. And Mary shrank from the thought of contact with the strange world outside Friston. Besides, as she told herself, it was only occasionally that Martha gave way to jealous passion. In her heart she was sure Martha loved her. But what is love without sympathy? Just a contradiction of terms, a rainbow without its colours, the moor with neither heather nor snow.

And Martha, who never went to church more than once in three months because she found the distance too great, talked of going as far to-morrow simply to prevent Mary hearing what Davenant expressly wished her to hear! Ah, well! if Martha would go Mary was determined she would not.

And, having arrived at this conclusion, the fatigues and excitements of the day drifted her presently to a condition of partial oblivion.

But the modern woman would have laughed at Mary's distress, and, had she deemed it of sufficient importance to merit comment, would have proved to demonstration that Mary was but reaping what



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she had herself sown. And Mary, in grieved astonishment, would have shown the grapes and figs she had planted. Could it indeed be possible that from them had sprung these thorns and thistles?

"Even so, my dear," would have come the equable reply; "you have loved 'not wisely, but too well."



CHAPTER X.

"Why is man endowed with the capacity for a beard?" he asked. "To hide his mouth, which would else betray his processes of mind and leave him helpless before an adversary." "But why has a woman no beard?" "Because with her, dissimulation and command of countenance are inborn."—SCHOPENHAUEB.

WHETHER or no Martha acted upon the advice she had given to Mary to "sleep" on the question that had aroused so much rancour, it is certain she had decided long before the breakfast hour next morning not to accompany her sister to the churchyard. The man would naturally suspect her of vulgar curiosity or worse, and Martha never wilfully allowed herself to occupy any position upon which invidious comment could be made by outsiders.

She was, nevertheless, more than ever determined to frustrate the proposed interview, and she had, as she told herself, most justifiable grounds for interference. To have made an appointment with a man was in itself too reprehensible an act to be even winked at, but that Davenant and Mary should meet and discuss matters relating to Jack and Joanna would be nothing less than criminal.

As Martha pondered, suspicion supplied her with an index of the carver's mind. Her brow darkened. He was arranging (was he?) that this girl of his should marry Jack! And Mary would aid and abet, for was she not "soft" on the carver? They would marry these young people and then each other! Their

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plans were as plain to be seen by a woman of sense as were their noses. But Martha would upset them. The banker should hear of them; he should be made to interfere; the proposed interview should—nay, must—be prevented. It would be the ruination of Jack were he to marry this girl, for whom Martha Barnard nourished a strong dislike, for the sole reason that Joanna had always manifested a marked preference for the gentle Mary.

But at the six o'clock breakfast, which Jack took with the sisters, Miss Barnard was all smiles and betrayed no curiosity as to that young man's doings or intentions.

"Ah, you spend to-day in Denby," was her sole and caustic comment, when he casually mentioned he thought of so doing.

But when he had set out, nothing daunted by the warm drizzle, the ideal "wet blanket," which enwrapped and effaced all animate and inanimate objects, Martha turned to Mary, who was putting the cups and saucers together, and in her blandest manner announced the decision she had arrived at.

"I have thought the matter well over, my dear, and shall not accompany you. At the same time I trust your good sense will lead you to avoid this interview, or arrange for it to take place in your own home, and under my protection. I will spare Stubbs to go over to The Gap this morning with such a message. A woman, remember, is never called upon to sacrifice her good name. I am sure you will agree with me there?"

And accompanying her words with a confident, encouraging smile, Martha left the room that both words and smile might the better work her will on

Mary's sensitive nature. By such methods she had again and again influenced her sister to forego harmless pleasures, or decline overtures of friendship (for Mary had found no happiness in courses Martha disapproved), and she fondly hoped they would now be strong enough to lead her to voluntarily refuse to see Davenant. But they might fail, so Martha determined to set other wheels in motion, wheels whose movements could never be traced to the steam from the "pretty kettle of fish" she lost no time in setting on to boil.

The banker breakfasted at eight this morning, and that meal concluded, Miss Barnard knocked at the parlour door ostensibly to learn her boarder's plans for the day.

"I sha'n't go out till it clears," said the banker.

"But sit down, Miss Barnard, and tell me about my nephew. He came back all right, of course?"

"He came back certainly, sir; but he's off again this morning. Treats the house more like an hotel than anything else. He'll be in for his supper, he tells me. But it's quite time, sir, that you exerted your authority. I've no wish to complain, but I must have something like proper hours kept. It was past eleven when he sat down to his supper last night, and I can't keep Bridget up night and day. When he was a child he dared not have set my rules at nought; but since he has put on these grand airs, and imagines himself a man, and you, sir, are in the house, I don't care to speak."

And the lady having cast her burden upon the banker paused, that he might critically examine and report upon it. Ronaldson was, indeed, most favourably disposed to listen to his landlady's statements and



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even opinions, for only the previous evening Lord Clanfalkland had spoken in the highest terms of

her intelligence and perspicacity.

"The Misses Barnard," he had said, "belong to a family as ancient as our own, and that particular farm has been held by a Barnard for the past five hundred years. When the last male Barnard died he left a heritage of debts and empty coffers. His widow (a second wife, and a woman of education and refinement) only survived her husband twelve months, leaving the little Mary, a child of two, to the guardianship of Martha then close on twenty,"

"And did you allow her to retain the farm, a girl of that age, and with no experience?" questioned

Ronaldson.

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"My father did," replied the host. "He said he could not resist her pleadings; moreover, she was something of a beauty, and my father had always a weakness for the fair sex. So, spite of his agent's advice, he permitted her to remain at Heather's Edge, and from that day to this she has never been an hour late with the rent, and, what is more, before she was thirty had paid off all her father's debts. Ah, you wonder how," for the banker looked the surprise he did not audibly disclose.

"Well, that I can hardly tell you. I do know though, that she was up every morning at daybreak, and saw for herself that the farm hands were at their appointed tasks; and what is more, she came to be regarded by them, I've heard my father say, as a sort of 'God A'mighty,' for whatever she undertook was carried through, spite of let or hindrance. What with a rigid system of retrenchment and a readiness to apprehend where a penny might be turned, she had

no difficulty in meeting all expenses, and giving her sister, her half-sister, I should say, an uncommonly good education, as education went then."

"A model wife lost, I should think," remarked a guest who had carefully followed his lordship's narration; "one of those rara aves, an unappropriated blessing."

"Perhaps; I shouldn't like, though, to dogmatise on that point," returned the nobleman, dubiously; "when a woman shows such abnormal ruling power she is surely better without such an encumbrance as a mere husband; while he——"

"Ah! poor beggar," and with a light laugh Miss Barnard had been dismissed from the conversation. But that brief biography was not without influence this morning.

"I'm sorry if he has upset your domestic arrangements," was Ronaldson's first response to his landlady's indictment of Jack. "I thought he returned early yesterday afternoon."

"So I heard, sir, but it seems he went off out with my sister directly he had had tea. I was in Denby, and—well——"

"Did you come upon him there?" asked the banker, for the lady's pause was significant.

"No, I saw nothing of him, sir, but the Davenants were in town, and your nephew met them last night on their return."

As her listener's look of astonishment was blended with annoyance Miss Martha proceeded with deprecation in tone and manner. "It's not my business, and certainly not my pleasure, sir, to find fault with the child I brought up from his birth to his fourteenth year, but after what you were good enough to tell me

the other night, I should not be doing my duty if I kept you in ignorance of doings you ought to be aware of. You wouldn't like, I know, to see his mother's fortune, let alone your own, thrown away on this or any girl he may take it into his head to propose to."

"Goodness no!" ejaculated Ronaldson, coming to a full stop in his pacing of the room, and fixing his gaze on his companion. "But there's surely no fear of anything of that sort yet awhile, Miss Barnard? He hasn't been in the place a week! He can scarcely have come to an understanding with this girl you say he met last night?"

"I know no more than you do about that, sir," replied Martha, slightly ruffled; "but it doesn't want an Elijah the Tishbite to foretell what will happen when a girl sets herself to entrap a young fellow."

"Is she that sort of creature?" inquired Ronaldson, conciliatingly. "What is her name, do you say?"

"Her name?" echoed Martha, snappily. "I can't tell you her name, simply because I don't know it. Davenant calls her niece, and she calls him 'Dads,' that's all I know; except that when she is spoken of it is as Jo. Davenant."

"Jo.?" echoed Ronaldson, and tone and manner disclosed strong disapproval of that nomenclature. It certainly sounded "fast"; he had been prepared for a "Susan" or "Jane." "So you think her a bad lot, Miss Barnard?"

"I did not say so, sir. My rule is never to discuss my neighbours, nor inquire into their pedigrees; but when a young man's future is at stake, it would be nothing less than a piece of gross wickedness if I didn't warn his guardian of what will certainly injure it."

"Quite so; quite so, Miss Barnard; and I'm truly obliged to you. Then you think——?"

"Well, if you ask me what I think—for when I say 'I think,' I'm on level ground and can't stumble—then I think, sir, that this Jo. couldn't be better described than as a lady's maid spoilt. That's my plain and unvarnished opinion, for, as I told you the other night, she has a trick of dressing herself, and really, if you didn't know just who she was, you might at first sight be deceived into thinking she was somebody else. And what's a young fellow to do in such a case?"

Although Ronaldson seemed to appreciate the difficulties of such a position as Miss Barnard depicted, he could not bring himself to believe that in the three or four days Jack had been in the place anything of a serious nature could have happened.

"You know what I mean, sir," continued Martha in explanatory tones; "that sort of thing tells so with

an impressionable young man."

"Then what do you advise?" was the banker's next question.

Martha regarded her questioner with blank amazement, while her lips unconsciously pursed themselves in contemptuous curves.

"I mean," stammered Ronaldson, "you would take him right away, I suppose?"

"I should break off the connection at once, whether he remained or not."

"But I've really no influence with him, you see," replied the other, seating himself at the same time at the opposite side of the table. "I've never identified myself at all with Master Jack's troubles or pleasures, and I don't relish the thought of being harsh with him now."

"Why should you not tell him of your plans, sir, at once? He's going to lunch at The Gap to-morrow. If he knows what you are prepared to do for him he won't oppose your wishes. Young men, and, for the matter of that, old ones, too, won't let a girl stand between themselves and fortune."

"It would, perhaps, have been wiser had I gone at once into things with my nephew," remarked Ronaldson, with something like dejection in tones and manner; "but I thought by postponing explanations until next week we might meantime become friends, and then the explanations would have been easier to make and to accept. I might, of course, speak to him now, as you suggest, but, as you see, he avoids me, will have none of me. If he gives me the chance I certainly will speak to him; but you tell me he is to be in Denby to-day."

"I said, sir," corrected Miss Barnard, "that he told us he was going direct to Denby at seven this morning—where he spends the day, though, is quite another matter. As like as not he'll drift to The Gap before tea-time. You forget they were children together and schoolmates."

"Then this girl is not without education?" questioned Ronaldson, with hopeful intonation.

"What she knows or what she doesn't know I'm not in a position to say," returned Martha, drily. "She's had no schooling except what she got in the village. But it's her position I think of, sir. Why, the girl visits nowhere; the Grange folks wouldn't think of asking her when they're here for the shooting. Indeed, sir, she would be just the wife, I should say, for Lord Clanfalkland's valet."

With a gesture of disgust the banker exclaimed, "The

idea is intolerable; such a marriage would be a catastrophe, and must at all costs be prevented. As you have warned me, Miss Barnard, I am sure you won't refuse to help me. There's not the ghost of a chance of my seeing him to-day, for I dine at the Grange and stay the night there. You are certain to have the opportunity of speaking to him before he goes to these people to-morrow, and I shall be infinitely obliged to you if you will tell him from me what I am prepared to do for him. My conditions are not hard. I propose to settle a thousand a year upon him till he marries or I die. In the former case I shall probably make it five, in the latter, he will have all my wealth. All I require in his turn is his acceptance of the position of my legal son, and his promise to choose a wife from my rank of life. Money I do not stipulate for, but I shall expect birth and refinement. Now, will you make these matters clear to him?"

Miss Barnard with difficulty concealed her delight at the offer of a commission so truly after her own heart. One wheel was working admirably, she now put on all steam to make the other revolve.

"Naturally, sir, you have the right to make conditions when you are ready to do so much for the young man," she remarked, in even tones; "but did I not understand you to say the other night that he will come into his mother's money next year? If so he may yet snap his fingers at you and take the girl."

"That is true," returned the banker, gravely; "but then he knows nothing, and need know nothing about that money just now."

"Well, sir, if you really desire the intimacy between Jack and Jo. Davenant broken off, there's a more likely way of doing it, I take it, than by putting your offer before him."

And Ronaldson listened with relief to the alternative

policy the lady proceeded to propound.

"Were I in your place I should call and see Davenant himself, and tell him in a quiet way something of your intentions for young Jack. Davenant's a dreamy sort of fellow, but he can take a hint, and, if I know anything of him, he has too much pride, I'm certain, to permit the friendship to continue. As likely as not he'll forbid Master Jack the house, in which case you will have accomplished your desire without exposing your little finger."

"That's not a bad idea, Miss Barnard," returned the banker, sincere admiration in his voice. Lord Clanfalkland had not over-estimated the lady's perspicacity. "As you are perhaps aware, I have had some correspondence with this carver (he was recommended to me by a friend in the north who heard of him through the London firm who takes all the work he can send them), so I shall be able to call on him without exciting comment. In fact, he is expecting me, and I couldn't do better than go to-day. It will clear soon, I should hope, and if so I'll call upon him on my way to the Grange."

"It will clear about two o'clock, I think, if not before, and if you really wish to see Davenant to-day, sir, I'll send Stubbs along to The Gap to tell him to expect you, or as like as not you will miss him. What time shall I say you will be there, sir?"

"It is very kind of you to arrange this for me, Miss Barnard," said Ronaldson, gratefully. "I have some letters I want to write, then I must call in the village for one I'm expecting, and I want to be at the Grange a little before six." "Shall I say between four and half-past five you will hope to find him in?" questioned Martha, with an almost imperceptible shade of anxiety in her tones.

"That will do nicely, thanks; it will be a capital thing if this foolish affair can be nipped in the bud and by other hands than mine. I only wish I had taken the boy from the first, then there would have been none of this trouble."

"Yes," returned Martha, an adept in "touching the spot," "that's what you should have done, sir; things would have been comfortable then all round."

"Yet how could I come here, Miss Barnard, unless I could tell you who the boy's father was? Was it possible (I put it to you) for me to have the child brought to Hurstwick, to his mother's native town, until I was in a position to give inquirers facts concerning the man she had married?"

Miss Martha made no other reply to these earnest questionings than that she endeavoured to convey by a stiff inclination of the head. She still believed that the banker held the key to the mystery surrounding the boy's birth, and she was not prepared to swallow any concoction made for the purging of a guilty conscience, or condone a silence, in itself criminal. Mr. Ronaldson, so she reasoned, had not paid her money year after year for nothing. That yearly payment was without a doubt the price for her silence, and silent she had been as regarded Jack, for never a word of any kind had she written to him since his departure from Heather's Edge. Silent she would remain, and on the eve of Jack's return she had been able to supply Mary with a truly praiseworthy reason for her change of front.

"Now that the banker is going to do the right

thing by the lad it will be best to let bygones be bygones," she had said. But it was quite another matter to allow Mr. Ronaldson to suppose that she was herself deceived by his professions of ignorance.

When, however, he laid, bit by bit, the whole story of his search for the missing husband before her, she was compelled, spite of her prejudices, to admit that this was no romance of his own weaving, but a history both true and strange. No one could simulate such emotion as the banker with such manifest difficulty held in check, and, as she followed the speaker's experiences in Ireland, New York, and New Zealand Martha could not refrain from ejaculating from time to time, "Well, I never!" "Humph!" and "Ay, me!"

"Believe me or not, as you choose, Miss Barnard, but I declare to you before God that from the hour I saw her lying dead in this house to the present moment, I have never obtained the slightest clue to the unravelling of this mystery. I know no more than the dead whom she married. That she did marry "— and here Ronaldson spoke more calmly—" I am convinced, and so, I am sure, were you. Unfortunately, you did not choose to believe my statement——"

Here Martha would have defended herself, but with a wave of the hand the speaker proceeded.

"Your attitude I forgave, for I recognised it as one of true, though mistaken, loyalty to my sister, and naturally I hoped to be able to prove your assumptions to be, what they were in every particular, false. But Fate willed otherwise. Then Mr. Brotherton complicated matters, for, acting upon the contents of a letter I had written him in Ireland the night before I was made acquainted with the fact of Mr. Jones's death, he caused a notice of my sister's death

to appear in the Hurstwick paper under the name of Jones. Of course, when I heard that that gentleman died a month before my sister arrived in England I could not bring myself to believe, and I do not even now believe, that he was her husband."

"I should think not, indeed," interposed Miss Martha, "and nobody as ever had the privilege of speech with Master Jack's mother would give that notion a second thought. The man who married her must have died directly after her death, or he would have turned up long ago. Unless, indeed, he'd anything to hide, and then he's best left to bide quiet. Jones, indeed! No, sir, that tub of a tale won't hold a drop of water, and if you tell it to Master Jack he'll pretty soon throw it back in your face. Would she now have told me her husband was on his way home from New Zealand if she had but just buried him?"

"But for Jack's sake, we can't drop this Jones; you must own that we can't?" and there was something pathetic in the man's evident helplessness.

"You'll excuse me, sir, if I refuse point-blank to assist in patching up a name for the public," exclaimed Martha, tones and manner severe. "You ought never to have taken up this Jones. And why didn't you come and tell me all these things twenty years ago? Then neither I nor Master Jack would have had any queer notions about you. If a mystery comes that you can't unravel, why on earth should you fence it round with lies? For a lie it is, that 'Jones' on the dear creature's gravestone. Better believe at once as the times of our Blessed Lord and the Virgin Mary have come again, than marry your sister in her grave to a man who was dead in his own

weeks before. Come, sir," continued the speaker, as she noted her listener's evident dejection, "leave things as they be; do no more, meddle no more with this mystery, or you may come face to face with what will fright you. Take that name off the gravestone. Tell Master Jack what you've told me, or give me leave to tell him. He'll see the wisdom of accepting your offer now, and you'll have him at Hurstwick with you before Christmas. What call to tell folks there he is your sister's son? Can't you adopt a child if you like, and if folk choose to sneer, I suppose you can bear it, sir? You'll have been sneered at already I should think, as much or more than any man living!"

However bracing Martha Barnard's advice might be, her way of administering it was at times almost brutal. Yet, though Ronaldson winced, he was bound to confess she had right on her side. inscription on the gravestone was a lie, and to advise Jack that his father's name was Jones would be lie number two. Of course, he could adopt Jack (if Jack would be adopted) without making any reference to Eleanor or her husband. Miss Barnard, it was clear, adjudged him a fool and something worse, yet how was it possible now to put things back as they were twenty years ago? He could not remove the gravestone, though he might adopt Jack. But if the young man saw that inscription and learned that it was placed there merely to whitewash his mother's name (so to say), doubtless there would be trouble. Why, ah why, had not he. Ronaldson, taken the child from babyhood and so shielded him from the shock of this scandal? All would now have been forgotten. and he would have had comfort and joy in his declining years.

But the voice of Miss Barnard aroused him from his painful reverie.

"I shall tell Master Jack everything," she was saying in hopeful tones, "and you'll find he'll come round right enough. Indeed, he may think himself lucky to have you ready to do such a good part by him. I can certainly speak better for you, sir, than you could for yourself, so don't be downhearted. Dear me! there's twelve o'clock. I'd no idea it was so late. I'll send Stubbs off to Davenant at once."

"Ah, do, please, and for God's sake, Miss Barnard, don't let Jack drift into this entanglement, or I shall feel my burden beyond my powers of endurance."

"Now, don't you worry, sir; the longest lane must have a turning. When I get him quietly alone tonight, he won't stand out against your kindness. Bless you, sir, he'll be offering you his hand when you come back to-morrow."

And Martha, with these encouraging words, left the banker. Born lover of power that she was, she felt several inches taller as she wended her way to the cowhouse, for the information she had just received gave her more pleasure than a gift of gold or jewels. Never did any being more thoroughly realise the truth of the dictum, "Knowledge is power," than did this woman who, in the sparsely-peopled world in which she lived, aimed at a sovereignty over her fellows as intimate and far-reaching as that of any Eastern potentate. But her crowning joy at this moment lay in the certainty that she had frustrated the meeting of Mary and Davenant. For if the latter remained at home, as he was bound, to see Mr. Ronaldson, it would be impossible for him to reach the churchyard until long after Mary had left it.



AN OATH IN HEAVEN.

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"But I'm only doing the right thing," she remarked, sotto voce. "The idea of his wishing to consult Mary, and asking for an interview out of doors! Tut, tut! If he wants advice the least he can do is to call here for it."

When at her usual hour Mary set out with a basket of jessamine and white lilies for the churchyard, Martha remarked with feigned or real regret, "Ah, my dear, I had hoped better things of you. It would have been so easy to have gone an hour earlier or later. But I'll say no more."

She could not, however, repress a smile when again seated in the keeping-room she bent over her work. Mary might wait ten, fifteen, even thirty minutes, but Davenant would not come to her, for it would be necessary for him to leave The Gap at four o'clock if he intended to meet her.

Other forces, though, besides those Miss Barnard could muster were at work that day, and proved the stronger. On reaching Friston Boughton that afternoon the banker found a telegram announcing the death of the Earl of Towermains. As Ronaldson had several claims on the late Earl's estate, his presence at Hurstwick was imperative. So he despatched a note to the Grange explaining his change of plan to his lordship, and then, finding he had a spare hour before his train left the junction, he hired a cob from "The Hand and Foot" and rode on to The Gap.

True, indeed, is it that "the best-laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft agleg," for it wanted five minutes to four when the banker and carver parted. As for the latter, he lost no time in keeping his appointment with Mary in Friston Boughton churchyard, for he had now more matter than ever to discuss with her.



CHAPTER XI.

A woman's love is essentially lonely and spiritual in its nature. It is the heathenism of the heart.—L. E. Landon.

Ir cost Mary far more than Martha's intuitions, powerful though they were, could appraise, to brave her sister's warnings and meet Davenant. Yet why, she argued, should she refuse to do an ordinary act of kindness because Martha chose to characterise it as wrong? Supposing a woman had said she would like to ask her a question when she went through the churchyard, would Martha have found just the same fault?

Was it really wicked of her to love this man? Could it even be unwomanly if he and everybody were in ignorance of her affection? Why should it be a crime to love a being who wore a coat and trousers, when a creature in petticoats might be loved to infatuation and no comment evoked? Had not God made both? Surely she might love this man as long as her love never disclosed itself!

Yet it seemed as though Martha, with her almost diabolic powers of intuition, had discovered her secret. What then? Then Mary owned to herself that in sheer self-defence she must strike out, and not merely parry Martha's blows. She would, she was sure, always regard Martin with affection; she should never, she was equally sure, love any other man, but in order

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that her love might remain inviolate she would, so she determined, repudiate it so thoroughly that even Martha herself would be deceived.

After all, it was mere jealousy on Martha's part, and to regard a simple matter like this as if it were one of life and death was as foolish as it was unkind. Naturally Mary asked herself why she, whose advice had been requested, should withhold it and allow Martha the opportunity of tendering hers. For, as Mary knew well, if she were to follow Martha's dictum and not only avoid the meeting with Davenant but ask him instead to call at the cottage, she would have no opportunity of speech with him. Martha would be present and, as usual, monopolise the visitor and the object of his visit, so Davenant's desire to obtain Mary's advice would be defeated.

Martha might say what she liked about this meeting. It was ridiculous to make such a fuss over exchanging a few words with a man who happened to pass through the churchyard when she made her weekly visit there. Of course, if Davenant cared to return to Heather's Edge with her she would offer no objection.

Yet the flutter at her heart as she neared the churchyard proclaimed to its owner in unmistakable language that the coming meeting was no ordinary, everyday affair.

Scarcely raising her eyes as she passed through the lych gate (though she heard the strains of the organ), she was well aware, long before she reached the grave, that Davenant was beside it. If only Martha had not tormented her so!

But controlling herself, as was her habit, she hid away every sign of self-consciousness under the cover of well-adjusted unconcern, and extending her disengaged hand, remarked in even tones on the loveliness of the air after the morning's rain.

"Have you seen Jack?" was her next observation, as she knelt to remove the withered flowers.

"I thought he said last night that he would come down with you."

"I had an idea that he would meet us here," said Mary, her shapely, deft fingers busy arranging the flower-stalks so that flowers and leaves only were visible in a design which called forth Davenant's silent admiration.

"Has Jo. been down long?" she asked, for she felt nervous as she realised that Martin was watching her.

"Yes," replied the carver, "she came off early this afternoon, she wanted extra time for practice she told *Marthe*. I had a visitor, so she didn't come in to say *Au revoir* as usual. Your Mr. Ronaldson called to see me."

And Davenant made a significant pause.

"Ah!" returned Mary, "was he pleased with the panels? I wonder where Jack can be," she continued, anxiety in her tones. Why did not Davenant say what he wanted to and go? "He went to Denby this morning. He is upset about several matters, and I know he wants to have a talk with you before he goes over them with Mr. Ronaldson. I wonder where he can be," she repeated, as, her work finished, she rose from her kneeling posture and looked anxiously up and down the pathway.

"Jack will be all right, Miss Mary. May I tell you what Mr. Ronaldson has been saying to me about him?"

And the carver by look and gesture invited his companion to accompany him across the graves to a

track which passed behind and above the vicarage, and where there were no cottages with idle women standing to gossip at the doors. All Mary's self-consciousness vanished in her desire to learn what the banker had made known to Davenant, and in answer to her questioning look the latter said:

"He tells me he has made every arrangement to adopt him—make him by law his son and heir; that Jack will join him at Hurstwick before long, very soon indeed; that he will have a large fortune at the banker's death, and that he intends, if he is a good chap and follows out his wishes to settle, I think he said a thousand a year on him when he comes of age."

As the carver concluded, he, in his turn, looked

inquiringly at his companion.

"Yes," she said, "I understand." And, as in a flash, her sister's unusually long colloquy with the banker that morning served to make her apprehension of the position clearer.

"You understand?" and Davenant nodded. "I thought you would. I did not let him think I did. I took it all as just a matter of course, and that it was of no particular interest to me. 'I am glad,' I said, 'to know he is so well provided for; he is a worthy young man,' and I dismissed the subject. But I saw through his talk, especially when he said he hoped Jack would not be foolish, and trusted he had got into no entanglements in Switzerland. And it was for this same matter I wanted your advice, Miss Mary, if you will be so good as to give it. You understand?" And when he brought his gaze to bear directly upon his companion she involuntarily felt the beauty and the power of the eyes so brown, so clear.

"It is about Jo. you are troubling," she said, her

self-consciousness returning under the fire of that look. "Do you, then, think she cares for him?"

"Ah, that I could not say; the thing with me is to prevent her doing so. He—I think, I do think that he loves her—and she must not have her life spoiled."

The two had been climbing a woodland path above the road for the past ten minutes, and when they emerged upon a small meadow which seemed to cut them off from all connection with any existence but their own, Mary felt a great shock at her heart. This was what Martha might with truth describe as a clandestine meeting, for the meadow was forlornly empty, neither goat nor cattle browsing there, and no view obtainable therefrom.

Though she knew it was a short cut to the Ridge, she instinctively quickened her steps towards the wood at its other side which, in comparison, was crowded with life. But her companion was still speaking of Jo.

"Oh, Jo. must not suffer," she exclaimed, scarcely knowing what she said, her great aim being to reach the other side of the meadow and enter the coppice which fringed it. There the trees would be friendly personalities, and their feathered tenants help to restore her fast-vanishing self-confidence. Martha had been right, she was now saying to herself, as she listened to the murmur of Davenant's voice; she ought to have declined this meeting.

Then, as they passed through the gate into the coppice, she regained some measure of self-control, though at first she scarcely knew what she was saying.

"Jack loves Jo., Mr. Davenant, he told me so yesterday; and it is his intention to marry her if she, too, cares for him, and you offer no objection. Indeed, I don't think he would trouble about any one's objections if Jo. would listen to him," continued Mary, feeling more at her ease now she was talking again.

"Is it so serious as that, Miss Mary?" and the carver's tones were grave. "What can I do, then? I must forbid him to come to The Gap. Hélas! Hélas! What will Jo. say if I have to do this? It is not that I do not like the young man, but I cannot have Jo. looked down upon by his people. And besides, I will not have it said that I encourage a chap who is to have much money to marry my niece. Why, Miss Mary, they might even say that Jo. used some arts to entrap him—voyez vous?"

That Davenant was excited was evident by his employment of idiomatic French literally translated. He looked so distressed, too, that his companion's self-consciousness fled away and her natural kindliness on the instant manifested itself.

"We must think," she said, "what will be best to do; indeed, I have been thinking ever since Jack told me how he felt towards Jo. It is scarcely likely that Jo. has given any thought to marriage yet, or even——"Mary hesitated, and the carver came to her relief with:

"No, no, no! I feel sure she thinks yet nothing about such things."

"Well, then, we need not consider her so much just now. You know, Mr. Davenant," continued Mary, tentatively, "I can't rid myself of the feeling that it is Jack's duty to follow out Mr. Ronaldson's wishes, at least until he is twenty-one, and I dare not take the responsibility upon myself of advising him to refuse this generous offer."

"I am with you there, Miss Mary!" returned the carver, warmly. "Vraiment, the offer is magnifique! A thousand pounds each year! For Jo.'s dot I can

only give one hundred fifty pounds, though when I am dead she will have more. No, no; he must not forego this wealth! And we must, you think, use every argument to urge him to accept? Eh?"

"I don't know about that," returned Mary Barnard, dreamily; indeed, unconscious for the moment to whom she was speaking. "Money is little, oh, so little, so poor and despicable in com-

parison with real love."

"C'est vrai," and Davenant's tones as well as words strongly endorsed his companion's observation; "but, you see, Miss Mary, this may be for young Jack—this feeling he told you of—only a passing fancy, and it may be, when he finds himself with other young ladies, that he will no more remember Jo. I have heard that it is sometimes like that with young men."

"Perhaps with some, but I think not with Jack," was Mary's response. And she shook her head as she remembered the voice, hoarse and tense with emotion, saying, "I love Jo., and please God, we will live out

our lives together."

"Still, it would not be well either for him or Jo.," she continued, "that an intimacy should be encouraged now. He has yet to hear Mr. Ronaldson's offer, and when that is before him he will be compelled either to accept or reject it. Should he reject it, I am sure he will do so solely or chiefly on Jo.'s account, because he feels convinced that she would not be received by the banker on terms of equality with himself. He will not have Jo. looked down upon, I am certain."

"He is a good fellow, Miss Mary," said the little Frenchman, in whose eyes a suspicious looking moisture was gathering, "but he must not be permitted to injure his prospects for what may prove only a passing fancy. When he speaks to me to-morrow I shall use my strongest persuasions to make him accept this offer."

"Ah, I could not do that," remarked Mary. "I could not urge him either way. But if he persists in refusing it, what will you do then?"

"Well, then, Miss Mary, I shall forbid him to come to The Gap at all. But if he refuse, how will he live? Oh, he must not dream of refusing!"

"He has some project on hand to earn his own living. He is a good linguist, and thinks he could easily obtain a tutorship—a travelling tutorship is what he would prefer."

"He's a good boy, truly a good boy, Miss Mary; but if he will not accept the banker's offer I shall tell him that I do not wish to see him; that, indeed, I will not have him at The Gap again. It does not hurt young men to be tried. If this affection you tell me of be sincere, then, when he is of age, he will come to me and then I will let Jo. listen-that is, of course, if he will be able, by working, to keep her. But now I shall give him no thought that I will receive him even then. No, he must have no small, small encouragement to forego this magnifique offer. Do you not agree, Miss Mary, that this is a good plan that I propose? See," and the speaker used his right hand with much vigour, to emphasize his words—"see, I say to him when I have listened to what he will tell me to-morrow, 'You go to Hurstwick with Mr. Ronaldson. You won't go? Then you don't come here. I not have you.' You think that will be right, Miss Mary?"

"Yes, yes, quite right," returned Mary, hurriedly, for she all at once discovered that they were nearing the end of the coppice and that another lonely little meadow lay ahead.

"I thank you a thousand times," Davenant proceeded, "for all the good counsel you have given me, and which it is my intention to act upon. And now—"

"And now," interrupted Mary, alarmed by she knew not what in the carver's manner, "I think we have said all that need be said on this matter, and I will not bring you farther. I feel sure all will go well, and your plan will be best for both Jack and Jo."

As she concluded she held out her hand in parting salute, and came to an abrupt stand.

The pause was made beneath a spreading fir, by whose branches the westering sunlight was broken into a thousand shapes and shades.

"But, Miss Mary," said Davenant, as he took her proffered hand, "I have not yet said my most important word, the word for which I begged you to accord me this interview."

And Mary, who thought she had given her hand in farewell, found herself drawn towards the purple of the tree trunk, and above the sound of innumerous bells ringing in her ears, saw the carver kneeling at her feet and heard him ask her to become his wife. The surprise of finding herself needed (as he assured her) by the man she had so long secretly loved, together with the agitation and the excitement attending this interview, so overcame her that she lost consciousness, and would have fallen had not Davenant, springing to his feet, caught her in his arms.

When two minutes later she opened her eyes, she heard her lover murmuring "Je t'aime! Mon Dieu, Je t'aime!" and in the look fixed upon her pale face read more eloquently than any words could render that her love was desired as well as returned.

For the carver, when his arms were about her in

her helplessness, discovered that the feelings of high esteem with which he had always regarded her were transmuted under the magic charm of protectiveness into enduring love. All idea of Mary being of use to himself or to Jo. vanished then and there and for ever in the longing that possessed him to have her for his very own, to love and to cherish.

He was all tenderness for having startled her, but, if she would listen to his supplication, she would make him the happiest man on earth. Mary, trembling with the sweet shock of this unexpected avowal, for sole answer slipped her arm within his, and raised her eyes for one brief moment to his face. She dared not yet trust her voice.

And he, overjoyed, led her forward to the empty meadow, the companion one to that they had passed through a short half-hour ago. Somehow the empty meadow seemed now of all spots the most desirable, for both had suddenly realised that each was for the other the only being in existence. Martha, Jack, Jo. were all forgotten, and Davenant had no thought of surprise at himself as he spoke of his past, and mapped out a future in which Mary was to bring him his chief joy.

On and on they walked and talked, forth and back, and back and forth in the little meadow where no prying sparrow nor whistling blackbird disturbed the happiness of these newly-made lovers.

Then all at once Mary thought of Jo., and with a sudden pang at her heart she faltered forth, "But Jo.?"

"Jo. will be a happy girl when she hears of my good fortune, Marie; she told me only the other day she wished you could live with us always."

"I couldn't come to you, Martin, if it would make Jo. unhappy."

"Oh, my dear love, there is no fear, no fear. She will be full of joy when I tell her you have done me so much honour. But what will Miss Martha say? She will not want to spare you, n'est ce pas?"

"Ah, Martha!" and Mary stood stock-still in the meadow from which the sunlight had long since departed, her heart heavy, as she thought of her sister. "She will be very angry, Martin." And the hand on Davenant's arm trembled.

"Hé bien, but that will not hurt us, Marie," returned the carver, lightly; he was much too happy to entertain forebodings of evil. "She will get over that soon, and as you say in England, 'hard words make no bones break.' You will see, I will say all things very nice to her and she will be very pleasant."

Mary shook her head, though she could not help smiling.

"Ah, but you will see," continued Davenant, confidently. "I have just the right tool that shall turn her from an ugly angle into a pleasant curve. Let us go now and tell her."

"No, no, Martin," cried Mary, genuinely distressed, "not to-night; I could not bear to have her angry with you to-night. I must try to prepare her in some way, but I feel such a coward."

"Now, you leave everything to me, Marie, and do as I propose. Say with my respectful compliments to Miss Martha that I hope to call to see her to-morrow afternoon. I will come as soon as I have heard what Master Jack has to tell me, and if you will be somewhere near the half-way elm at five o'clock, I will bring Jack, and the two of you can walk down to

church together. At the same time I will talk to Miss Martha. All will be right, Marie, never fear."

"I must go home now, Martin; see the dew is heavy, and she will ask me what I have been doing and why I am so late. No, do not come any farther, Martin, I shall just fly along by myself. Ah!" And in another minute Mary was fleeing from her lover—the first kiss she had ever received from man's lips imprinted on her own, her whole being thrilled with the marvel, the joy of it.

But as to how Jack and Jo. had spent the evening neither of the middle-aged child-lovers in their great happiness gave even a passing thought.

CHAPTER XII.

Or I'll be thine, my fair, Or not my father's. For I cannot be Mine own, nor anything to any, if I be not thine. To this I am most constant, Though destiny say No.

-The Winter's Tale.

APART from the promise of joy which the prospect of a quiet outlook upon the wonderful change in store for her afforded Mary Barnard, she felt physically too weak to bear anything of a contentious nature after parting from her lover.

On reaching the half-way elm she moderated her pace, and then an unutterable longing seized her to weep out her happiness on some kind breast. To have that joy spurned, covered with opprobrium, treated as altogether worthless, would, she felt, kill her outright. So, instinctively, she let the light of it fade from her eyes, permitted her shoulders to droop and her feet to drag as she entered the cottage, while all the time her heart was singing the refrain it had never ceased to repeat since Martin held her in his "Je t'aime, Mon Dieu, je t'aime!"

What a hypocrite she knew herself to be as she flung herself with a sigh on to the nearest chair in the keeping-room and well out of the range of the lamp. close to which Martha was seated knitting.

The latter, taking no notice whatever of this exhibition of fatigue, calmly raised her head and regarded her sister with a severity the spectacled eyes did much to accentuate. "I must request you in future to be at home at the appointed hour for meals," she remarked in her iciest tones.

"I'm so sorry, Martha, I am late to-night," was Mary's ready response. "I promise it sha'n't occur again."

"No; and I promise you I'll not have you going to The Gap again. If you have no respect for yourself, no sense of decency to prevent you going up there after the man whom I'd taken good care should not meet you in the churchyard, I have fully determined to take matters into my own hands. If I have to leave Heather's Edge I'll do it rather than have our good name dragged in the dirt. I'm ashamed of my own flesh and blood."

"What do you mean, sister?" cried Mary, on the very verge of tears; Martha's words were so terrible, her look withering in its scorn. "I've not been near The Gap: I went to the churchyard as usual and came back by Braxted Coppice, and—and—I've got my feet quite wet," she concluded, lamely, a sob in her voice.

"Then do you mean to tell me you haven't seen Davenant?" said Martha, sharply.

But before Mary could make any reply Jack strode in from the garden. "Davenant?" he echoed. "Davenant went to Axmoor Edge this afternoon after Mr. Ronaldson left him, and he hadn't come back an hour ago." Miss Barnard greeted this information with a sceptical smile.

"You can please yourself about believing me," continued the man. "I have walked straight here from The Gap, and in my hearing the young servant

told Jo. that her master had an appointment with someone at Axmoor and might not be back till late."

Martha's face fell. All the evening she had been nursing a righteous anger, so she styled it, against Mary's shamelessness, and to have it proved by independent authority that her accusations were as baseless as they were base galled her very soul. The knowledge that her plans had worked out so well and that the proposed interview between Mary and Davenant had not taken place, did not at first bring her sufficient satisfaction to outweigh this latest annoyance. Mary had, of course, been to see Jane Badger, who lived on the north side of Braxted Coppice; she did so now and again after her weekly visit to the churchyard. Davenant, it was quite clear, could not have been with her, for he could not have got to the churchyard before she left it. That explained why he had gone to Axmoor, where he grew his own wood for carving purposes, and from time to time disposed of surplus or unsuitable material. Martha felt she had acted like a fool in making so much of what Mary had insisted to be a trivial matter.

Well, it was a very good thing the two had not met, and before she could exhibit anything like awkwardness or embarrassment Jack gave her fresh food for surprise.

"By the bye, Miss Barnard, Mr. Ronaldson left a message for you with Mrs. Gibbs, of 'The Hand and Foot.' He found a telegram at the post-office recalling him to Hurstwick, and thither he went this evening. He would not have gone till to-morrow, though, had there been any trains running on Sunday."

"Gone back to Hurstwick?" exclaimed Martha, the almost incredible announcement sweeping away

by its gravity and suddenness all the angry reserve in which she had entrenched herself. "What's he gone back there for?"

"I believe he went because the Earl of Towermains, the eldest son of the Marquis of Pierhampton, of the Abbey, Hurstwick, died yesterday. I suppose the Earl was a client of his. Anyway, he's gone, and Mrs. Gibbs asked me to tell you that he will write to you early next week."

Then turning to Mary, whose very breath had been taken away by Jack's unlooked-for, opportune appearance and announcement, the young man said, in quite another manner, "I must have been in the church when you arrived with the flowers and so missed you. I had no idea Jo. played the organ, and by Jove, she plays it beautifully, don't you think so?"

But Mary dared not trust herself to attempt anything like conversation. Rising, and at the same time pressing Jack's hand, she said, "Excuse me, sister, I must take these damp shoes off, and if you do not want me I won't come downstairs again."

"As you please," returned Martha, drily, "there's food in the pantry; you can help yourself."

Mary wanted no supper, she was only too delighted to be alone. What happy chance could have occurred to lead the fat Eliza to say her master had gone to Axmoor? But Mary had not delivered Martin's message, and she felt like a criminal in having kept silence as to his whereabouts. So before permitting herself to contemplate her newly-acquired joy, she wrote a little note and affixed it to the pincushion in Martha's bedroom.

"Dear Sister [it ran], I did not go to The Gap. I should never have dreamed of doing so; but I did see Mr. Davenant, and he

wished me to tell you that he hopes to call upon you to-morrow after tea.—Your loving sister, MARY."

She could not say less, and she dared not say more. And now that her conscience was at ease she fell on her knees beside the bed and poured out her heart she had no words-in silent thanksgiving to the Invisible Giver for the wondrous joy He, and He alone, she was convinced, had Himself bestowed. seemed almost incredible that she was now to have a kingdom all her own; joys, hopes, fears, confidences which Martha could neither mar nor meddle with. How true the remark she had read only a few days ago in a book of Jack's on drawing: "It is where the bird is makes the bird." What a happy bird would she be safely domiciled in Martin's heart! And what a nest for her! Then Mary remembered Jo.'s enigmatic words of the previous week, her "lovely idea." Could she have referred to such a possibility as in one short hour had become so grand a reality?

While Mary's thoughts, like a player who has unexpectedly become possessed of a Cremona, were occupied in evolving ever fresh and delightful harmonies, a fierce and mortal conflict was being waged below between Miss Martha and Jack.

The latter had spent the greater part of the evening with Jo., an experience of itself more than sufficient to raise his spirits to their highest level. But his crowning joy had been the sight—for the first time—of the stone at the head of his mother's grave—surely the stepping-stone to that Paradise he had pictured wherein Joanna would reign, his queen and wife. Such a public attestation of his mother's absolute right to the name of Jones as the inscription afforded was in itself, so Jack reasoned, irrefutable evidence of its

truth. And, accepting it as truth, he found it an easy matter—for Jo. was beside him—to believe that though his uncle might be eccentric, Miss Barnard was the mother, as she certainly had been the nurse, of the mystery that hung over his parentage.

So when, on Mary's departure to bed, that lady informed him she had a message from the banker for him, he found it difficult to conceal the contempt he felt. He had already proved one of her statements, or rather insinuations, to have had no foundation in fact, and he was deeply annoyed that his uncle had chosen her as his medium of communication.

"Don't look daggers and thunderbolts at me," she remarked, as she regarded the tall figure now leaning against the high mantel, "and do sit down, for I've quite a history to give you."

"I prefer to stand, Miss Barnard," returned Jack, drily.

"Oh, very well; please yourself," said Martha, pleasantly.

She was determined, if possible, to keep her temper; if she lost it she recognised that all her power to influence would go with it.

"First of all, you must be told that Mr. Ronaldson is, without doubt, your mother's brother, and, therefore, your uncle."

The lady expected some expression of astonishment, some token of interest to follow this announcement. But it was she who was surprised when her listener remarked, with a brevity bordering on rudeness,

"The church registers at Hurstwick testify to that fact."

"So that's where you went last Thursday," she exclaimed, at length, and with an unconscious addition

of respect in her voice. "Hum, hum!" she continued. "Well, it makes my task all the easier, and remember, if I gave you wrong ideas about his relationship to you, he, not I, is to blame. He owns that and, moreover, admires my loyalty to your mother in acting as I did."

"Your message, Miss Martha," said Jack, with tense intonation.

"The message first, if you will, and the history after. Your uncle offers to settle a thousand a year upon you till you marry or he dies, and will leave you all his fortune on condition that you become his legal son and marry from his rank of life."

Martha here deliberately placed her knitting on the table, as though it were the shadow of the good things to come of which she had spoken, and then peered through her spectacles at the figure now standing drawn up to its full height upon the hearthrug. What she saw was not calculated to inspire her with confidence in her persuasive powers. The hazel eyes of the handsome young face, flashed with a glitter of steel, and the lips, crowned with moustache of deepest brown, fell into contemptuous curves when the banker's conditions were announced.

"Haven't you a word of thanks for such a magnificent offer? Are you wholly without feeling?" burst from Miss Martha, at length.

"The history, Miss Barnard, and make haste, if you please."

Then, with some preliminary remarks on gratitude, which made Jack think of Ann Vigors and her "soto-say ha'penny thank you," Martha commenced the wonderful story, following closely the order in which she had received it. As she proceeded her listener's look and bearing gradually changed, he left the hearth-

rug and seated himself at the table opposite the narrator. As he sat there, grim and alert, now putting a brief, disconcerting question, now noting a date or name in his pocket-book, Miss Barnard felt herself in the presence of a Spanish Inquisitor, and her hopes of inducing him to entertain his uncle's offer rapidly fell to zero.

"And that is all?" he said, at length.

"So far as I am aware, that is all; a very strange and a very sad story. But all's well that ends well, and there is no occasion to publish it. I've always kept a still tongue in my head, and, as you know, I always forbade you to talk to any one about your mother. No one excepting Bridget (for her aunt and old Dr. Stocks are dead) knows that you are the son of the lady who lies buried in our churchyard under the name of Jones. Mary, of course, knows. would have been better on all accounts," continued Miss Martha, judicially, "as I told him this morning, if your uncle had not had the stone put there, then no one could have connected you with it, but having 'Ronaldson' upon it has made some people talk. When they speak to me I always say that you were related to her very distantly."

Jack, who for some minutes had been pacing up and down the little room, his brows knit, his eyes almost shut, his mind debating whether it should or should not accept the remarkable story offered for its consumption, became suddenly alive to the nature of Miss Barnard's last remark.

"You know as well as I do that she was and is my mother. Why shouldn't the village know it, and the whole world, too? Ay, and the world shall know it.

When I was a child," he continued, pausing before the woman, who, in spite of herself, was a little scared by his vehemence, "I believed all you told me; but now I am a man I fling from my mind, as I fling this wasp and crush it beneath my feet, the suspicions and insinuations you have fed me with from babyhood. What are the plain facts? My mother marries during her brother's absence, and because she does not know where to address a letter to him, waits till his return to inform him of the fact. She travels from America, where she has been doing an angel's work, to meet and tell her brother of her marriage. On her way she is belated here; you take her in; she writes to her brother, asking him to come at once and fetch her away; I am born, she dies before he can arrive. Then, you and my uncle, I together, trump up a mystery which has no foundation in fact. She told you her husband was on his way either to or from New Zealand. What more likely than that he was the captain of a vessel, or even a passenger, and what more likely than that the ship went down, and instead of joining each other, as they had fondly hoped at Hurstwick, their meeting-place is heaven?"

"You talk like a child," interrupted Miss Martha, utterly ignoring the young fellow's reproaches. "Do you suppose anyone but yourself would believe such a tale?"

"If I had been my mother's brother the world should have been made to believe it, for I am as certain that my father was my mother's husband as I am certain that I stand here, and, God helping me, I will discover who my father was or die in the attempt!"

"Fine words! Fine words! But fine words butter

no parsnips. Your uncle has done all that any man----"

- "Done all? How dares he say so? He never even advertised for particulars of her marriage, you told me that yourself."
- "Of course not; how could he? To have done that would have been to cast a slur upon her name."
- "Cast a slur, do you say?" returned Jack, with all his former fierceness. "Let me tell you, Miss Martha, I won't have such words spoken in my presence. To have advertised would have been proof positive to all the world that she was wife as well as mother. His silence was criminal, for who should have known her so well as the brother who professed to be devoted to her?"
- "Your uncle never has doubted the fact of your mother's marriage, and he lived for many years in the hope that your father would discover himself. We all make mistakes, and if we had our time over again we should very likely act differently. But there is no going back, and no amount of fault-finding will alter things. The best you can do is to let bygones be bygones, and accept Mr. Ronaldson's offer in the spirit in which it is made."

Jack was again on the hearthrug towering to his full height and, with hands crossed and clenched behind him, said in low, tense tones, "I'll break stones on the road before I'll touch a penny of his money! He is a liar! That gravestone is a black and cruel lie!"

"Yes, but think how strangely he was placed. Mr. Brotherton gave your mother's name as Jones in the certificate of death, though I begged him not to do so, and as Jones it was entered in the church register. Your uncle, under these circumstances (for

it is open to anyone to consult these registers), felt that it would be wise not to drop the name, for when you are at Hurstwick with him people are sure to ask you about your father. Come, forget and forgive, lad. Don't stand in your own light; a thousand a year is not to be despised, and some nice girl down at Hurstwick will ——"

"Silence!" thundered Jack, his brows heavy with brooding anger.

But Martha's patience was exhausted. Springing from her seat she exclaimed, "Silence yourself! I'll not be told to hold my tongue in my own house. I'm not deceived, let me tell you, by all this fine talk, and I've taken good care Mr. Ronaldson sha'n't be deceived. You fancy yourself in love with that chit at The Gap, and you pit a girl you know about as much of as I know of Greek, against the generosity of a man worth five hundred of her! Let me tell you Mr. Ronaldson won't have anything to do with baggage of that sort, nor give a penny piece of his money for you to waste on gimeracks for her. If you want her, you may want the banker's money for ever, for never a glint of it will you get till you've turned your back on her for good and all. Bah! Go, I say! I haven't patience even to look at you!"

But this contemptuous adjuration, accompanied as it was by a wave of the speaker's right hand to the door, left Jack unmoved upon the hearthrug. When (as he phrased it) the fire works were over, he added insult to injury by quietly inquiring, "Did he give you the history of his back-hair, Miss Martha?"

For reply the lady cast upon him a glance that would have shrivelled the less robust Mary, and lifting the lamp from the table she marched from the room, leaving Jack to grope his way to bed in the darkness.

Late though it was, his mind was too alert as yet for sleep. He was furious that his uncle had permitted himself to doubt for a moment the honour of his sister, furious that his own birth had not been proclaimed to the whole world, and particularly furious was Jack that Ronaldson had erected that lying stone above his mother's grave. For, accepting as gospel truth the inscription upon it, Jack had told Jo., as they had stood this evening beside it together, much that now it would be necessary for him to contradict.

Ah, Jo.!—Jo., with the eyes of heavenly blue, eyes so soft and luminous, eyes that could dim with tender sympathy, yet dance and flash in mirthful anger! For her, Mr. Ronaldson, the world itself would be very well lost.

That anger of Miss Martha's (as anger so often is) had been very informing, and Jack now had no lingering doubts as to the banker's feelings towards Jo. Well, peace be with him, his mysteries, his eccentricities. Let his money go to whomsoever he might choose; as for Jack, he would have none of it. Mercifully he was not bound to this blunderer, whose faith in the sister for whom he had professed a love passing the love of women had proved too rickety for him to venture, on the strength of it, to advertise for particulars of her marriage! An advertisement in the New York papers twenty years ago would certainly have brought the truth to light; now other methods would have to be used. Such cowardly affection was not worth calling by the name of love. Jack, with the fine scorn and intolerance of youth, could find no excuses for it; his passionate devotion to his mother's



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memory admitted of no shadow of doubt as to the ultimate result of his quest.

So he found no difficulty in casting off the banker and all his works, and quietly set himself to form plans which had for their ultimate object the presenting to Jo., with his undying affection, the offer of his true surname. For nothing that was false would he ever beg her to accept.

As day dawned he fell asleep, and in dreams he again heard that compassionate entreaty peal from the organ in response to Jo.'s touch: "O, rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him, and He shall give thee thy heart's desire!"

CHAPTER XIII.

The colour gladdens all your heart;
You call it heaven, dear, but I—
Now hope and I are far apart—
Call it the sky.
I know that Nature's tears have wet
The world with sympathy, but you—
Who know not any sorrow yet—
Call it the dew.
—ALETHEA GYLES, from "The Dome."

AT eight o'clock next morning Jo., a broad-brimmed straw hat upon her head, was standing at the top of a flight of moss-grown steps in the rear of The Gap, dispensing corn to a company of pigeons as they strutted in the paved yard below. Their glossy necks and heads gleamed gloriously in the August sunshine, and the girl's hair, as her hat slipped back, made a golden auriole, from beneath which the deep-blue eyes looked out in keen enjoyment of the scene.

"Do come here, Dads!" she cried, as she caught sight of the carver's form at the back door. "Just look at Peter! Oh! le petit gourmand! And see how pouter Jean looks after his little wife! I shall rechristen him Le Modèle, I think. Non, non! Allezvous-en! Allezvous-en! Venez-ici, venez-ici, ma petite!" she continued, her exhortation addressed with much severity to greedy Peter, her invitation, couched in tender, encouraging tones, to a timid, non-assertive bird who was faring rather badly in the crowd, and for whose special benefit she now flung a good

handful of maize beyond the margin made by the feathered feeders.

"Oh! but you are stupide, stupide!" she exclaimed, as the non-assertive creature failed to take advantage of the special providence; and with a "Fort bien, 'tis your own fault!" Jo. sprang down the steps and, linking her arm within Davenant's, drew him towards the moor beyond.

To reach it they passed a curious looking erection composed of twelve stone pillars, six vis-a-vis, about ten feet high and five feet apart, upon which a wooden, well-thatched roof was spread, the sides being open. Under the cover afforded oak, pear, cherry and boxwood for carving purposes were stored, as well as a quantity of firewood-all neatly piled. At the distance of a few feet, where the ground shelved down to the huge gap in the limestone, ran a small stream, in which newly-cut timber lay soaking to get rid of the sap and so prevent after-shrinkage. In the grey stone walls which surrounded three sides of the yard and fenced it off from the moor, the polypodium, the foxglove, the tiny English geranium, and the poppy found a lodgment and waved their beautiful ensigns in glad response to the gentle salute of the morning breeze.

And the colours on the walls were reproduced over and over again above the carpet of crimson heather summer had spread over the moor. On to this rich and gay carpet uncle and niece stepped, steering their course towards a huge limestone boulder—a favourite perch of Jo.'s. The girl chattered in high glee, the loveliness of the morning in her eyes and in her heart a well of joy, the source of which was as yet undetected by her.

"Oh, Dads!" she cried, "isn't the world a lovely thing and our moor the most charming spot in it? But you haven't a button-hole! How could I have forgotten it! Ah! these bachelor's buttons will be just the thing for a bachelor; and what a splendour of colour they have! I think I never saw such crimson ones on the moor before; they must have been coquetting with the heather!"

And with a merry laugh the happy girl fixed the flowers in her uncle's coat and then stood back to judge of the effect.

"Ca ira!" she sang. Then struck by some undefined but evident difference in her uncle, she said, approvingly, "But you do look nice this morning, mon chéri! What have you done to yourself? It can't be the new tie altogether, nor yet the white waistcoat."

"Et tu, mignonne? Qu' as tu?" echoed Davenant, his usually dreamy eyes shining with a steady light. "You look quite bewitching, yet it can't be altogether the new white gown with its sprinkling of forget-menots?"

"Of course, I look specially nice because to-day is my name-day," Jo. answered with a delightful assumption of sauciness, "and you have given me just the very book I wanted. Can you believe it, though, Dads—I can't; but can you believe that to-day I am nineteen? Now I'm so old I really must be grave. Fancy, I go out of my teens to-day! Isn't it sad?"

And though the girl's voice harmonised with the sentiments she enunciated, her look and laugh entirely contradicted them.

"There's no reason why you should ever be sad,

my child," remarked Davenant, with conviction; "but tell me, now, what you were doing last evening."

"Ah, Dads!" and Jo. lifted and shook her fore-finger in reproving fashion, "you were very naughty. It is you who must tell me what you were doing. Jack and I had such a chase—goose-chase, Eliza calls it—and a very good word, too, I think—after you. When we came back from the church Marthe told us you had gone to Axmoor, so we went far, far along the fields, but no goose—I mean no Dads—could we see. Oh! I was tired, fatigued to death, and when we got back still you were not returned, so I sent Jack away and went to bed. Tired? Yes, I was tired. I fell asleep at once and never heard you come in."

"Then you and Jack spent the evening walking about," remarked the carver, thoughtfully. Had he and Miss Mary been locking the stable door after the steed had been stolen? "Where did you come upon him?"

The two were now seated on the boulder, Jo. on the round, flat top, and Davenant on a lower shelf, from which, as he put his last question, he raised his eyes to the bright face above him.

"Why, Dads," and the carver noted with some uneasiness the flush which suffused her cheeks as she busied herself with his button-hole, "do you know, Jack was in the church all the time I was practising, and I hadn't the least idea of it! I thought, of course, he would be with Miss Mary. I played 'The Storm' and 'O, rest in the Lord' and the hymn-tunes for to-day, and several of the *Leider ohne worte*, and when I came down I never saw him nor any one. Then I went into the churchyard, and while I was standing by

the grave looking at the flowers Mary had left Jack came and stood beside me."

"Well," said Davenant, "and what then?" for the girl had paused; some happy memory had evidently checked her utterance, for a sweet look was on her face, followed quickly by one of eager interest.

"Oh! first I must tell you about the grave and that wicked Miss Martha! I never did like her, and now I right down hate her for the cruel trick she played on Jack. Would you believe it, she has pretended to him ever since he was born that she didn't know who his father was, although she was expressly told by the gentleman who came to his mother's funeral that her husband's name was Jones. Actually, all these years she has kept the truth back from Jack; she never even told him about the gravestone, and when he saw it for the first time last evening I really thought he would have cried for joy."

"I can't for the life of me make out what you are talking about," observed Davenant. "Do you mean to say that the lady whose grave Miss Mary looks after was Jack's mother?"

Jo. nodded. "I have known that," she said, "almost ever since the stone was put there, for I was so surprised to see 'Ronaldson' upon it that I asked Miss Mary whether the lady was related to Jack. Then she told me, but said I must never tell any one until Miss Martha gave permission. But now Jack knows he wants all the world to know, and won't he be angry with Miss Martha! You should have seen the contempt on his face when he spoke of her. I never wish to have anything more to do with her; she is as fond of mischief and mystery as a dog is of the sun. Jack says so, and he lived with her till he was fourteen."

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"Miss Martha is not a very nice person, I grant you, Joanne, yet I should never have thought she would have gone out of her way to annoy an innocent child," remarked the carver, gravely. "Besides, his uncle could have set that matter right at any moment."

"Yes, that's just what he has done by putting this stone up; for, as Jack truly says, Mr. Ronaldson would not have dared to put a downright lie upon a grave-stone. He was so happy, Dads, when he saw it, and he says he will never call himself Ronaldson again. Won't it be strange to have to say Jack Jones?" and the girl laughed merrily as she fanned herself with her hat. "All the same, though, Jack doesn't like his uncle, and blames him as much as he blames Miss Martha," she continued, fully realising the importance of her position as raconteuse.

Davenant felt vaguely uneasy and keenly annoyed that this queer history should have been thrust upon Joanna. He had never troubled himself to inquire into Jack's parentage, and had accepted without question the statement that Miss Martha tended the grave of the lady who had died at Heather's Edge so many years ago, because the lady had no near relatives, had died, in fact, a stranger among strangers. Dreaming over his work, he had neither time nor inclination to listen to gossip, and had never connected Jack with the lady whose sudden death was now an almost forgotten incident in the neighbourhood.

On all accounts, it would be better that the intimacy between the young people should be broken off; Miss Martha must have had good and sufficient reasons for her action; she was no fool. It was not worth while, though, to discuss the subject with Joanna; the best thing he could do was to prepare her for the coming separation. Rising to his feet and taking a prolonged stretch, he gazed over the moor in perfunctory fashion.

"Come, my child, let us walk," he said; "these stones are a little damp for you. As for this history you have just recounted," he continued, in matter-offact tones, as, his arm in the girl's, he turned in the direction of home, "it is of no importance to us, and you had better put it out of your mind at once. Jack will never need to change his name, for his uncle has decided to make him his legal son, and heir to all his property."

"But, mon chéri, did I not just now tell you that Jack doesn't like his uncle? I'm sure he won't go to live with him, he told me he wouldn't. Neither would I, if he asked me a hundred times. He's never taken the trouble, if you can believe it, Dads, even to see Jack until this week, and now he pretends a great affection for him. 'Come,' he says, 'come to me; I am hot, fan me; I am dull, cheer me; my back hair is in a tangle, get it out!' But Jack knows better."

And the girl's pleasantry crowned itself with silvery laughter, while her lovely eyes danced to its measure.

"This is foolish talk," observed the carver, with something of severity. "Mr. Ronaldson, as Miss Mary would tell you, has a claim upon Jack. He placed him at Heather's Edge, and has provided for and educated him. It is plainly Jack's duty to go to his uncle. Indeed, what else can he do, he has no money?"

"He is going to break stones on the road before he goes to Mr. Ronaldson, he says. You see, Dads, his mind is quite made up. He wouldn't live with that

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chimpanzee fellow for anything, he says, and I think he's quite right."

"I know that it is very wrong of Jack to talk so of a man who, however eccentric he may look, has done a good part by him," said Davenant, didactically. "Besides, chimpanzees haven't hair hanging down their backs."

Jo. smiled. "You couldn't call him a lion, Dads; he didn't look a bit like the king of beasts when I caught sight of him on the cob yesterday."

"Let me tell you, Joanne, that this is no laughing matter. Jack didn't know, when you saw him yesterday, all that his uncle is prepared to do for him. But I know, for Mr. Ronaldson told me himself. As soon as Jack comes of age he will settle a thousand a year on him."

"A thousand pounds a year!" echoed Joanne, slowly, her gaze riveted upon her companion. "Why does he offer him so much to be his son? It is like bribing."

"Nothing of the kind, my child. Mr. Ronaldson has no children, but he has a lot of money, and naturally wishes his sister's son to enjoy it. He told me yesterday that Jack is his sole remaining relative. He is an uncommonly lucky fellow, and all who profess friendship for him will rejoice in his good fortune."

A strange, disagreeable feeling, as of the claws of some wild creature at her heart, held Jo. for a moment silent, but recalling Jack's confident words and looks of the previous evening, she ventured: "All the same, Dads, I don't think he will take this money, and Mr. Ronaldson cannot compel him to be his son."

"If Jack is such an ingrate, such a fool as to refuse this offer, I, for my part, shall have nothing more to do with him. But it's not worth while to discuss such an improbability," continued the carver, with a finality in his tones that struck his listener chill. "His duty and his advancement go together, and both are equally plain. We, too, have a duty, which, if we have the slightest regard for Jack, we shall not fail to perform; if he hesitates we must urge him to accept."

"But, Dads," said the girl, wonderingly, that clawlike grasp upon her heart no whit relaxed, "why not leave him to do as he likes! Why should you mind!"

Davenant cleared his throat and vigorously blew his nose before replying. "Because I have a great regard for the lad, Jo.; because I can't stand by and see a young man throw away a chance that doesn't come to one in a thousand. Supposing he objects, as you think he will, and I were to listen, sympathise with and support his objections, ten to one in five years' time he would turn round and reproach me for having done so. Jack is young, and young people, though they think they know everything, want saving from themselves. Because I am his friend, because I know, too, how greatly his guardian will suffer if Jack refuses this offer, I shall counsel him to accept it, and you, ma petite, must give him the same counsel, too."

Jo., though she scarcely knew what she was fighting for, would not yet lay down her arms, but her final arguments were somewhat lamely presented. "Jack doesn't care for money at all, and I'm sure he would hate to be always idle."

"He won't be idle, my child. There is the banking business he would probably go into, or the University. With his uncle's influence, position, and fortune he will, no doubt, later on enter the Senate. Oh, there

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is a great future before the lad if he is only wise enough to take advantage of his opportunities."

The two had for some time carried on their conversation while leaning against the gate that led from the moor into the yard, Jo. making little excursions every now and again for a flower that caught her fancy, though she never went out of range of her companion's voice.

"Hark!" she cried, as she stood with her back to her uncle, her right hand raised. "Are not those the Gladford bells ringing?" So loud, so metallic was the clanging in her ears she might well have mistaken it for bells beaten, shapen and rung by the hand of man.

"It is only a little past nine," returned Davenant, consulting his watch and still speaking in French, as he usually did to Joanna.

"Ah! I have time then," said the girl. "I want a few more flowers for the salle a manger, and then I must go and try on my new gloves." And she ran off in the direction of the brook, to reappear in a few minutes on the other side of the gate against which Davenant still leaned.

"Regardez, mon oncle," she cried, gleefully, while she displayed a huge bunch of large-eyed forget-menots, their lovely colours gaining in depth and clearness from the background of the girl's white gown. Then she ran into the house, talked gaily with old Marthe as she arranged the flowers, and at length sought her chamber.

As she crossed its threshold her whole attitude and appearance changed. Dry-eyed, she seated herself sideways upon a chair, and with an elbow thrown over its back, supported her cheek upon her hand as she gazed away over the moor which half-an-hour ago had

seemed so lovely. Now it might have been a desert, for one thing alone filled up her vision and that stood out stern and bare and cruel—Jack and she were to be separated for ever.

"Poor little life that toddles half-an-hour, Crown'd with a flower or two, and then an end."

If only he had never returned from Switzerland, if only they had not had that talk together last evening, that talk which had brought them so close to each other, it would not have mattered so much. If only last Thursday she had known of this proposal it would have been different, but now the thought of separation was insupportable.

If Jack accepted this offer she knew quite well that he would be cut off completely from all intercourse with his old friends, cut off more irrevocably, more cruelly than by death itself.

And yet—and yet—!

Thought seemed checked for a moment, and the girl's heart stood still, for the stern, hard fact at which she gazed so sorrowfully was actually moving, moving to disclose a Presence, which all this time it had concealed, although without it there would have been no stern, hard fact at all.

At the sight the girl's eyes dilated, a gentle sigh escaped from the parted lips, and then, with raised head and outstretched arms, she cried in softest tones, "My love! my love!"

For now and here for the first time she realised the true significance of Jack's looks and tones and words of the previous evening—knew herself beloved. Rising, and still with outstretched arms, she walked to the window as though to meet a visible object. But

now her hands were clasped, her eyes lifted to the filmy blue of the heavens. She loved and was beloved! As that knowledge continued to force itself upon her consciousness, her whole being was thrilled through and through with its magnetic might, and she was fain to sink upon her knees and rest her arms upon the window-sill.

Yes, the moor was indeed charming, the blue of the sky deep and tender as a mother's bosom. Jo.'s lovely eyes grew soft and luminous as, for a brief time, her fair spirit bathed itself in its newly-discovered fount of joy, only to spread wing and fly to the Giver of all love.

Yet three days ago she had ridiculed the idea of a lover! But then she had no idea that love could come so swiftly, so suddenly. It was like a mighty eagle bearing her aloft whether she would or no.

Yet close upon it followed Duty ready to drag it down, and even trample it in the dust. Jack's prospects must not be spoiled nor endangered for love of her. Dads had said in plainest words that no one having the slightest regard for Jack's interests would give him even the smallest encouragement to forego the banker's offer.

What a horrid man that banker was! Of course, he would never think of including Jo., or her uncle in his visiting-list; and Jo. had no desire to be there. She fully shared Jack's aversion for the strange-looking individual, but if Jack accepted this offer he would have to follow out Mr. Ronaldson's wishes, and mix with his friends.

She now understood the true significance of Jack's reiterated determination last evening that nothing should, or could, induce him to do anything which

would involve the loss of the friends and companions of his boyhood. What ought she to do?

She had risen, as though to face the difficult question more squarely, but all the time Love was whispering to her that Jack would think neither of money, nor position, in comparison of her love. It was of no use attempting to come to any decision, for every other minute her attention was diverted by the recollection of some look or word of Jack's; or some lovely possibility Hope insisted upon showing her.

In the midst of her reverie, which had made her oblivious of the fact that the bells had been ringing for some minutes, a sharp knock at the door was followed by the summary entrance of the fat Eliza, fully attired for church.

"Laws, Miss Joanner!" she exclaimed, "ain't yer begun to dress yet? Yer uncle's a-brushin' his hat down below, an's ready to be off."

"Ah, Je me dépêche," said Jo., as she ran to her wardrobe, from whence she took a hat of black lace with
sprays of blue convolvulus, a hat, which, spite of its
simplicity, Lady Miriam Clanfalkland might well have
envied, so admirably did it set off the lovely face and
glorious hair.

Eliza was, however, far too much concerned about her own appearance to bestow any consideration upon that of her young mistress, for whose attention she instantly clamoured.

"Look y' here, Miss Jo.! I've come in a purpose to show yer me new bodice. You won't have to find fault wi' me shape now. Ain't it nice, an' I got it for a surprise for yer. Ain't it nice, I say?" she repeated.

But as Jo. cast merely a fleeting glance at her, while she opened a drawer for the neglected pair of new

gloves, Eliza continued, "Oh, yer can't see just lookin' like that!"

Then planting herself by the dressing-table with her back to the window and with a touch of impertinence in her manner, she again apostrophised her mistress, whose thoughts were otherwhere.

"I say, Miss Jo., do look just for a minute. See, I come out here, I go in again here, and come out again lovely! Lors, I do hope I sha'n't sneeze."

It was utterly impossible for Jo. to refrain from laughing, and for once Eliza had done her a good turn. For when Davenant caught sight of his niece's merry face, he concluded he must have been altogether mistaken in supposing she had conceived any deep feeling for handsome fatherless Jack.

CHAPTER XIV.

I did not take my leave of him, but had Most pretty things to say; ere I could tell him How I would think on him at certain hours Such thoughts and such; or have charged him At the sixth hour of morn, at noon, at midnight, To encounter me with orisons, for then I am in heaven for him; comes in my father And like the tyrannous breathings of the north Shakes all my buds from growing.

CYMBELINE.

THE change in her uncle which, on the moor, Jo. had dimly apprehended, must have betrayed its raison d'être long before the two had arrived at church, had not the girl been so desirous to conceal her newly-discovered joy and sorrow.

The Davenant of a week ago had vanished, and in place of that dreamer and worker-out of dreams was a man whose every movement this Sunday morning proclaimed the alert, responsible being. The sense of protectiveness which only yesterday's interview with Mary Barnard had thoroughly developed, was now in active exercise in regard to her as well as Jo.

This was evident when, at the close of the morning service he exchanged a few words with the former, and turning to Jack, who stood beside her, said, "You are coming to lunch with me? Good; but oblige me by taking Miss Mary as far as 'The Cross Fingers.' Jo. is sure to be a few minutes longer, and

you will reach The Gap across the fields almost as soon as we do."

The request surprised the young man, but he went off with a good grace and felt rewarded by Jo.'s bright smile when he caught up the pair; while Davenant congratulated himself that he had prevented the young people having been seen together by either the villagers or the visitors at the Grange.

Jack had not forgotten Jo.'s name-day, and in her uncle's presence presented his small gift, a tiny prayer-book, upon the fly-leaf of which was written "Jo.—from Jack." The carver thought it wiser to take no notice of the matter; what he intended to say to the young man later on would be too plain for its significance to be ignored.

And the wind was unexpectedly taken out of the sails of Jack's offering by the fat Eliza, who, after the three were seated at table, presented her mistress with a ball of blue-grey fur, over which Jo. immediately fell into ecstacies.

"Oh, you darling!" cried the happy recipient, as the blue-grey ball uncurled itself and a lovely Persian kitten stretched fore-paws and jaws in the style of the best English pussydom.

"For yer buthday, Miss Joanner; yer said you'd like one, so I begged it of Mrs. Smith, the coachman's wife down at the Grange."

"Thank you so much, Eliza. There, asseyez vous donc minette!"

But Jack wished the kitten at Jericho, for Jo., apparently, had neither eyes nor ears for any other body or thing, while Davenant kept up a tiresome monologue on Swiss carving. What with the kitten on one hand and carving on the other, poor Jack

felt himself cruelly used, and thankful, when, the meal concluded, an adjournment was made to the summer-house. Davenant had expended much artistic skill upon the place, the shadowed interior of which was now brightened by dishes of ripe raspberries and strawberries upon the rustic table.

Jack and Jo. were soon engaged in a hand-to-hand tussle over the kitten, who, serpent-like, had followed its mistress into this Eden, when Davenant startled them both by saying, "I have a confession to make."

His listeners regarded him with unfeigned astonishment, while a whimsical smile for a moment held his lips from further speech. Then, having filled the pipe upon which his fingers had been busy, he said with commendable brevity, "I'm going to be married!"

"Oh, you lovely man!" cried Jo., springing to his side, while puss, to save herself from an ignominious fall, hung on by her claws to Jack until she had obtained sufficient purchase for a flying vault. "I couldn't imagine what it was that had changed you so. So that's where you were last night when we went that goose-chase! Now, when will Miss Mary come?"

"Miss Mary?" echoed Jack, "and she never said a word to me about it!"

"No, for Miss Martha has yet to be told," remarked the carver, grimly. Then Joanna opened upon the affianced man such a fire of questions that he almost lost his equanimity, while Jack would so gladly have changed places with him, for the girl's hand was upon her uncle's arm, her lovely eyes dancing with mischief as they tried to read his very soul.

"Come, come, that's enough, Jo., quite enough!

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Now, Jack, let me hear what you had to tell me, for I must go to Heather's Edge after tea."

"Poor Dads! I do pity you from the very bottom of my heart," said Joanne, as, without casting so much as a glance at Jack, she strolled out of the summer-house and down the garden-path, from whence her voice was presently wafted as she called in coaxing tones, "Minette, minette!"

Jack was somewhat embarrassed by the carver's sudden demand. To be called "to stand and deliver" one's hopes and fears as though they could be produced as easily as a watch or coin from some outside pocket, struck him as an unfeeling request. There was, however, no time to be lost, and without pausing to arrange his confidences in anything like sequential order, he said, "I've quarrelled with Miss Barnard, I've thrown over Mr. Ronaldson, and I'm leaving Heather's Edge in a few hours' time!"

This brief summary of past and coming actions was followed by the hurling of a newly-lit cigarette into the Gap, to the side of which the summer house clung. "The fact is, sir," continued the young man, looking straightly at his elder, "I am going to finish the work my uncle, Mr. Ronaldson, ought to have completed twenty years ago. To-morrow I'm off to seek for my father."

"But, my dear fellow, I thought—didn't Joanne tell me that——!" commenced Davenant.

"Yes; last evening when I saw Joanne, I believed the story—I ought to say the lie—my uncle has had placed above my mother's grave. Nay, I am not wrong in so describing it, sir" (for the carver's look was a reprimand), "as I have it direct from Mr. Ronaldson, conveyed and supported by Miss Barnard, that

the name Jones is not, and was not, and could never have been, my mother's. That being so, my first business, for my mother's sake, is to discover her husband's name, and place it where the false one stands."

"Let us get down to the glen," said the carver, "we shall not be disturbed there, and I confess that I don't in the least understand what you are talking about. You must know that yesterday your uncle called here, and was in high spirits at the prospect of having you shortly with him at Hurstwick. He told me, indeed, that he intended to make you his legal son and heir, and settle a thousand a year on you."

Jack's lips curved scornfully, while Davenant awaited his explanation.

"I'll have nothing to do either with him or his money." And with flashing eyes came the statement, unanswerable in the speaker's opinion, as an argument against further intercourse with the banker. "He was afraid—afraid, you understand—to advertise for particulars of my mother's marriage. It was not merely cowardly, but criminal neglect. I'll not be unfair, though. You shall hear the whole story as he gave it to Miss Barnard yesterday morning, commissioning her to detail it to me. I suppose he was afraid of my reproaches. Coward!"

The two were pacing up and down a strip of greensward which meandered between two miniature forests of birch and fir. The sun was high, but a pleasant breeze stirred the trees and brought refreshment to the heated brow of the young man. Davenant, in his growing interest in the recital, paused in his walk, and both men stood rooted to the ground until it was finished. "You cannot, you dare not, tell me, sir, that this man—my uncle, mind you, the only brother of my mother, has the ghost of a claim upon either my companionship or affection? Why, he never cared to set eyes on me till last week!"

"I must tell you, Jack," explained Davenant, resuming his walk, "that when Mr. Ronaldson told me of his plans for you yesterday, I made up my mind to quarrel with you if you refused to carry them out. But——"

"But now you have heard my views on the question," interposed the younger man, with more cheerfulness than he had manifested throughout the conversation, "now you are ready to give me your blessing, and a 'God speed you.' Is it not so?"

"I hardly think I can go so far as that, my lad," returned Davenant, slowly, as though weighing his words. "I cannot see how you are to succeed where your uncle failed; neither do I for one moment believe that your father still lives. I recognise your goodness of heart in the endeavour you propose to make with the object of establishing your mother's honour but, so far as I am able to judge, her honour is not, nor has it ever been jeopardised, since she was buried in the name of Jones, and that name now rests as hers above her grave."

"But that name is not hers. Oh, sir," and the carver looked with admiring wonder at the handsome, earnest young face of the boy who believed so firmly not only in his mother's honour, but in his ability to prove it, "do you not see that until I have discovered my father, I, myself, am nameless; that I have no name to offer Joanne, for love of whom I am ready to lay down my life! No, no! I must seek, and seek until I find!"

"Come, Jack; leave Joanne out of this question, please; whatever plans you make let none be founded on the hope of marriage with her. She is but a child, and with no thought of love or lovers, so I forbid you to speak to her of your affection, or to tell her this strange story of your parentage. Let her believe, as she does, that your mother's name was Jones. Go on this quest of yours, if you are so minded, but do nothing without full consideration. If you decide to go, remember, I wish to hear nothing from you for full five years, or at least, until you have discovered your father."

"Meanwhile, sir," implored the young man, deeply

agitated, "she may forget me."

"She may or she may not. I tell you, Jack, I won't have her bound; so there's an end of the matter. Joanne is not a girl to forget her friends, but it is better for both of you that you should neither hear of nor see each other for some time to come. You know I like you, lad, and no lad better, but believe me, how ever hard you may find it now to stand alone, in the end you will be glad to be able to say, 'This did I of myself; no one persuaded me.' Come, pull yourself together, Jack, and let us get back; Joanne will wonder what has become of us."

And from this decision Davenant would not budge.

But Joanne was wondering greatly what had come to herself. How was it, that though her heart ached with the longing to show Jack how terrible was the prospect of the separation he had hinted at as being so near of realisation, she laughed and talked like a creature without ordinary sensibility?

As the two men came up the garden path, she was standing on the step of the porch, and when they drew

nearer she plucked the crimson roses as they climbed about her, and pelted them both therewith, while she remained apparently oblivious of the eagerness with which Jack caught and reverently preserved the lovely blooms.

Tea had been set in the shade cast by the gables, and when the three were seated (Jo., bantering her company upon their fondness for each other's society), the carver said, "What have you been doing with yourself, mon enfant?"

"I've been breaking the joyful news of Mary's advent to Marthe and Eliza. Marthe is very glad, but Eliza said—oh, but Eliza is a droll creature—"

"What thinkest thou, mon enfant" interposed the carver, by no means desirous to hear what the fat Eliza thought of his prospective marriage, "this fellow here had an offer of a thousand a year for life last night, yet he coolly refuses it as though it were a pottle of cranberries!"

"Vraiment! Are you then so rich, Jack?"

"No, no; but you see this money had conditions tacked to it, one of which was——"

"Very easy conditions, let me tell you," interposed Davenant. "However, he prefers to have his own way, and all we can do is just to bid him good luck."

"You refuse this money?" cried the girl, her brows puckered as though such a probability were nigh inconceivable.

"If I take this money I must lose my friends, Jo.," and the look that accompanied the young man's words was more informing than any speech; but the girl was apparently oblivious of it.

Shrugging her shoulders she said, "Well, I won't meddle in the matter. If I had the offer of a thousand

a year I should just pop down on my knees, and say, 'Let dogs delight to bark and bite,' I should be so grateful. But oh! Dads, I can't get the thought out of my head that Mary is coming. I'm just dying to have her! I shall have to go with you on the honeymoon, you know; you won't be able to get rid of me, for I shall stick like a burr, part of me on you, and part of me on Mary. And won't I tease you both!"

So the girl rattled on, as though the momentous decision Jack had taken was not worth a second thought. All the interest she had manifested in his doings only twenty-four hours ago had vanished as completely as though it had never had any existence. The young man was pained and puzzled, yet he found his love adorable, even when she put salt in his tea, and burnt his hand with the hot spoon she had secretly prepared for that purpose.

The meal concluded, Davenant went indoors to wash his hands preparatory to his visit to Heather's Edge, whither Jack was to accompany him as far as "The Cross Fingers." Thence the young man would make for Gladford Rise Station to inquire about his train. Jo., unable to remain quiet for an instant, dashed after the kitten, as it made a false start after the carver, but when it sought shelter beneath a gooseberry bush the girl was brought to a standstill.

Jack, realising how precious and fleeting were the moments that remained to them, said with tender reproach, "This will be a long 'Goodbye,' I fear, Jo.; for me it will be an eternity. But you won't forget me," he continued, imploringly.

Joanne's face visibly paled, but her glance falling on a thin, red mark, which zigzagged down the back of his left hand, she utterly ignored his appeal, as she cried in tones in which flippancy and interest were equally mingled, "Why, what have you done to yourself? That's Minette's doings, I'm sure! I'll punish her!" And away flew the girl to seize the culprit kitten, which, unconscious of impending evil, had emerged from beneath the gooseberry bush, and was calmly and diligently washing its face in the middle of the path.

"How dared you treat a friend so basely, a friend you'll never see for ages?" asked Jo., of the now frightened creature she was holding out at arm's length, her fingers firmly gripped beneath its forepaws. "You'll be sorry for your cruelty when he's gone. Tell him you're sorry at once. There! That will teach you to behave properly in future! Ah——!"

"Oh, Jo.! she has scratched you too! What a spiteful little beast she must be! Here, have my handkerchief."

And while Jo. with a grim smile observed, "She thought I wanted punishing, I suppose. Well, we each have a wound now," Jack reverently stanched the crimson drops that oozed from the small white hand, and carried the stained handkerchief away with the crimson roses as part and parcel of Joanne's very self.

But Davenant's voice was heard calling the young man, and with an "Au revoir, Jack! My best love to Mary!" Joanne scarcely waited till the men were out of sight ere she fled to the glen; where, for the hour that remained before the evening service she paced up and down wondering what manner of creature she could be.

"He thinks I do not love him," she murmured. "He believes each word I said. Ah! how could I,

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how could I act as I did? I believe I could be a great actress if I tried. I'm sure I deceived Dads." And then she fell to weeping. To have found him, only to lose him! And it was not until her fingers were upon the organ keys that her heart was in any degree lightened of its burden of self-reproach and apprehension.

And she never guessed that, in response to Jack's silent call, her heart had leapt to her eyes in the moment of parting, and that he knew himself beloved.

CHAPTER XV.

For she had a tongue with a tang.

The Tempest.

It was shortly after Jack went to Switzerland tha Jo. had begged Mr. Cartwright to teach her to play the organ, and in an incredibly short space of time the pupil bid fair to surpass her master. As he muscular powers developed she lost nothing of tha delicacy, that sympathetic treatment which gave to her sketches their chief charm. But on this Sunday evening, so eventful to the inmates of Heather's Edg and The Gap, there was no hint of sympathetic treat ment, no suggestion even of a player. The organ itsel had vanished, and in its stead the voice of a sou thrilled and throbbed through and above the aisle till it reached the footstool of the Throne itself. was the chorus from Athalie "Promised joys menaced woes," and as the voice, now hopeful, nov despairing, rose and fell in impassioned tones, al present felt the tension as well as the relief when soft and clear as an angel's voice, rang out the Vo humana of the soprano -

These cries of doubt forbear! Our God will make all clear.

And following it, the triple harmony of the treble expanded into the full, convincing chorus,

Hearts feel that love Thee Nought can disturb their rest.

And so Jo. eased her heart, and Miss Mary, too, was comforted. Poor woman! She had, indeed, had a hard time ever since she left her bedroom in the morning and her dreams of coming joy. Martha, who rarely went to church in the height of summer, yet more rarely regarded Sunday as an occasion for late rising. But on this particular morning, overcome by fatigue and petulance consequent upon her fruitless efforts to shape the destinies of Jack and Mary to her own pattern, she decided to remain in bed until the dinner hour. She still believed that she had wrongfully accused her sister of meeting Davenant, for her sleepiness on retiring after her stormy interview with Jack, and her shortsightedness this morning, had prevented her seeing the modest little note affixed to the pin-cushion. When Mary entered with tea and toast Martha pretended to be asleep, and Mary had no difficulty in removing the missive as she left the room on tip-toe. "Surely," she silently argued, "I may as well give Martha a verbal message from Martin when I return from church; she is so very angry now, I do believe she would have a fit if she knew I had seen him yesterday."

As it was, the message Mary gave at dinner, that Davenant wanted to see Miss Martha and would call for that purpose early in the evening, sounded quite natural to its recipient, and gave her a grim kind of pleasure. "He wants to see me, now! Hum! He shall hear my mind on several matters! But what ails you? You look as white as a sheet!"

"Oh, sister; I'm so upset. Jack has been telling me all about the talk he had with you last night. He talks of leaving us to-morrow, perhaps to-night." And Mary was so overcome by conflicting emotions that she buried her face in her handkerchief to hide her tears and stifle her sobs.

"Well, you and Martin Davenant between you have been the lad's undoing," remarked Miss Barnard, cuttingly. "Davenant wants him for Jo., as I knew he would. If he hadn't got some plan in his head to entrap the boy he would never have asked him to The Gap to-day. Jo.'s at the bottom of Jack's obstinacy, and I took care to tell Mr. Ronaldson so. Between you all you've ruined the lad's future. I've told him his duty plain enough, and now I wash my hands of him."

"But don't you think, sister, that it is a little too much to ask Jack to give up all his friends for a man who has never taken the least notice of him since he was born, and whom he was brought up to——"

"Now, now, be quiet," interposed Martha, in warning tones. "You're going to blame me, as usual; but I'll not have it. Eat your dinner, and leave Jack and his concerns alone."

Mary met Davenant at the garden gate as she was setting out for church in the evening, and had just time to say, shyly, "Martha knows nothing about our talk last night, nor even that I saw you; please don't tell her. She's going to be very angry with you because Jack won't go to his uncle. But I mustn't stop."

Martha was evidently getting impatient, for she was now standing upon the doorstep with much the same look upon her physiognomy as that assumed by the spider when he invited the fly into his contracting parlour. But Davenant felt himself equal to the occasion, and cleverly concealed his sang froid under the gay covering of cordiality.

He commenced the interview by saying how greatly he regretted Jack's determination to have nothing to do with his uncle.

"I should not have asked him to take lunch with me to-day had he not expressed the wish to have some talk with me. I like the lad, mind you, Miss Barnard, but I think him foolish to throw away this good fortune. If he persists in doing so I have told him I shall prefer to hear nothing of or from him, at least for some time to come."

"Quite right, Mr. Davenant; you are quite right. I'm afraid," continued the lady, with an apologetic laugh, "that I was ready to misjudge you when I heard you had invited the young man to lunch to-day. I really fear a dreamy person, and such I know you to be. Dreamers let things drift, and drift, and then, as the saying is, there's the devil to pay!"

"I am afraid, Madame," returned the carver with great politeness, "that I have been somewhat of a dreamer, but hope that now I am awake, wide awake, as you English say, and that I will not go to sleep any more!"

And the two laughed affably together, Martha delighted to find her companion so agreeable. But his next words brought her figure to attention, and caused her curved lips to harden into straight lines.

"I beg of you now a great favour, Miss Barnard; it is that you accord me your approval to my paying my addresses to your sister, Miss Mary. I know, of course," he continued, diplomatically, "that she is of an age to decide for herself, yet I should be glad to have your sanction and approval of my suit."

For a scarcely appreciable moment there was silence in the room, and then Martha observed, an acidity in her tones she vainly tried to secrete, "I suppose you have discovered, Mr. Davenant, that Miss Joanna requires a chaperone?"

The carver bowed pleasantly. What a woman this was for intuitions!

"Without a doubt, Madame, Jo. will be much happier with a lady for companion, but I have myself a high esteem, I may say a great affection, for Miss Mary."

"Ha!" interrupted Martha, still holding herself well in hand. "You know we have a proverb, 'No fool like the old fool."

"Mees Barnard! I beg you will not be hard on a poor bachelor. You have, too, another proverb is it not—'Never too late to mend.'?" And the Frenchman laughed so heartily at his opportune quotation that Martha was compelled to laugh, too.

But she had not yet done with the man, and if he had expected to plane off her many angles by dexterous compliments he was destined to find himself mistaken.

"You must understand, sir," she remarked, as the easily-roused laughter fell into silence, "that that proverb refers only to things that can be mended. Some things it is impossible to repair—I should say, rather, to undo; you recognise that?"

But the carver, albeit dimly, recognised only that a trap had been set to catch him unawares, and though puzzled, was silent. What could the woman be driving at?

"Ah! you will not help me, I see," continued Martha, "so I must speak plainly. There is one matter which I must have satisfactorily explained before I can consent to your paying your addresses to Mary."

Still silence on the part of the carver, so, after a slight pause and a little apologetic cough, Martha proceeded:

"There is Miss Joanna."

"Ah, Jo! yes, yes!" interrupted Davenant, immensely relieved; "she will make no trouble for Miss Mary, she will only be too happy to welcome her, to

have her company always."

"Excuse me, sir," returned Martha, drily (she did not appreciate this tribute to Mary's popularity), "I have not the slightest doubt as to Miss Jo.'s desire to have Mary's companionship, nor of the benefits which would accrue to the girl therefrom; the matter I referred to is of far greater moment. It is not pleasant for an unmarried lady, as I am, to have to go into these questions, but I have a duty to Mary, as well as to our family, to perform, and I am not one to shirk duty, however disagreeable I may find it. So I ask you to be good enough to inform me of the exact—the exact, I repeat—relationship between yourself and Miss Joanna."

"Mon Dieu!" cried Davenant, his fair speeches put to instant flight by this unexpected attack. Rising to his feet, his hands spread out, his body bending, swaying as it had not bent or swayed since his first coming to England, he poured forth a complete vocabulary of the French language.

A supercilious smile curved the lips of Martha Barnard as she sat erect during this performance of French antics, as she afterwards described the carver's movements. How she revelled in her power to reduce men to puppets, and then make the puppets dance to her measure!

As Davenant at length concluded his harangue with an emphatic "voilà tout!" Martha merely shook her head.

Then, withdrawing the supercilious smile, she observed, in her driest tones, "This is all very fine that you have been saying, I doubt not, Mr. Davenant,

but I know nothing of French, and will, therefore, trouble you, if it is an explanation you were giving me, to put it into English. If it was only an excuse, I should prefer not to have it translated. In which case you will understand that I shall never give my consent to your having anything to do with Mary."

"Pardonne, Madame," said the carver, with sudden calmness, "in my great surprise at your question I forget that you know not French. I will now say to you these facts in English. Jo. is my niece, that is to say, the daughter of my only niece, and lest you should still have any fear that such is not the case, to-morrow I shall bring you the—certificate, you call it?—of her birth. But this I told you twelve, nearly thirteen years ago, when I come first to The Gap."

"But if your niece—we should say great-niece—why does she always call you Dad?" was Martha's next query—she wasn't one to leave a stone, however small, unturned.

"Ah," returned Davenant, "that is for her only a little, what you call pet name. Her father was English

like her mother, and he taught her when a baby to use the English word 'daddy,' and when he died, before she was three years old, she looked on me as her 'Dad,'

and has never left off using the word."

"You say her father was an Englishman, why, then, is she called Davenant?" continued Miss Barnard, determined not to let her victim go until all doubtful matter was cleared away.

"Ah," said Davenant, in deprecatory tones, "that has perhaps been foolish, but I had not thought harm could come of it. She never liked her own name, and always as a child called herself Joanne Davenant, so when she came to England I foresaw no reason, no

objection to her still using my name. Now, though, since you speak of it, I see it was not perhaps wise. However, to-morrow I shall bring you not only the birth certificate of *Joanne*, but that also of the marriage of her parents. Had she some English relations, then I would have said 'keep your own name,' but they are all dead. Now you see, voild tout!"

"I am bound to tell you, Mr. Davenant, that you have acted very foolishly, certainly most thought-lessly, in this matter," said Martha, primly. "Of course, I believe what you have told me, yet I think it will be wise for you to let me see the certificates as you propose. I shall then be in a position to speak with accuracy on the subject if questions are put to me, as doubtless they will be. Now, with regard to Mary, I have always told her that I would never prevent her marrying, so she can do as she likes. I fancy you will find her an easy conquest."

And again the supercilious smile curved the lady's lips. Yet she was not altogether displeased. To have brought Davenant to acknowledge that he had in any acted foolishly added considerably to Miss Barnard's already considerable stock of self-esteem. and so paved the way for a less unpleasant interview with Mary than the latter had dared to expect. Besides, though Davenant was utterly unconscious of the fact, his inquisitor had very cleverly compelled him to place an important piece of information in her hands, information which she had apparently desired solely in the interests of virtue and her sister. "Just as I thought," she remarked sotto voce, a few evenings later, when the promised certificates were before her; "the girl's a mere nobody, and now I've got black and white to support my statement to Mr. Ronaldson."

CHAPTER XVI.

My son, my son! I cannot speak the rest; Ye that have sons alone can know my fondness, Ye that have lost them, or who fear to lose, None else can guess them.

H. More.

THE June following young Jack's departure from Heather's Edge found his guardian in Hurstwick after an absence of months spent in aimless travel. He knew nothing of his nephew's whereabouts, and this ignorance, coupled with the young fellow's hostile determination to render himself independent of his uncle, placed the latter in an unpleasant as well as painful position. True, he had said nothing in Hurstwick of his intention to adopt his sister's son, but all his plans, for at least the past two years, had centred in that resolve of his to acknowledge the relationship and enjoy the companionship of one so closely bound to him by blood. The new place he was building a mile or so outside Hurstwick was still unfinished. the contractors unable to fulfil their engagements for lack of definite orders. Such and such rooms were to have been devoted to Jack's use, furnished and decorated as he himself might desire.

To avoid explanations and inquiries, Ronaldson had absented himself as much as possible from the town, and though recalled now by some business matter, he had planned to leave for Norway in a day or two. As far as he knew, no one excepting those concerned

with the business he had returned to negotiate was aware of his presence in Hurstwick at this moment. He was, therefore, extremely surprised, when seated at breakfast on the morning he had fixed to set out for Norway, to receive a brief note from the Marquis of Pierhampton, begging him to proceed to the Abbey at once as he had matters of the greatest importance to lay before him.

Now, Ronaldson had always avoided anything like intimacy with his lordship, even when, as had frequently happened of late years, the two had served side by side on the same council or committee. His attitude towards Jim's father had never advanced beyond the most distant courtesy, and this for Jim's sake. For though Tom never ceased to blame himself for his share in an act which had banished and probably brought about the death of his friend, he considered the treatment of Jim by the Marquis as beyond the range either of vindication or forgiveness.

Yet there was no denying that the old man had been grievously punished, and with all Ronaldson's bitterness a very real pity for him was mingled. His eldest son had died childless nearly a year ago, his second and only remaining son was also childless and in such a precarious state of health—brought on by excesses—that his life was not worth "a year's purchase." So, in a desolate old age, the nobleman had to face the distressing fact that the Marquisate, for so many centuries held by the Warner family, must pass ere long to a distant branch, and the name of Warner be known in connection with it no more.

Was he contemplating destroying the entail, or didhe wish to negotiate a loan? That the Pierhampton property had suffered through the extravagances of



the two sons was a matter of general knowledge. It was just possible the Marquis might only be wishing to consult him about some private matter connected with the late Earl Towermains. The present Earl banked elsewhere.

But conjecture was merely waste of thought; soon Ronaldson would hear what the business was. So hastily finishing his breakfast, he lost no time in setting out for the Abbey.

St. Mary's chimes were ringing the hour of nine as he stepped on to the broad, flagged High Street of "sleepy old Hurstwick," and a pleasant stir of bustle mingled with the sweet freshness of the summer atmosphere, for it was market day. Ronaldson's house stood on the key-stone of the hill, up and down which the fine street stretched, terminating in either direction in a double massive stone gateway. These, formerly entrances to the ancient feudal town, are each crowned with tower and church, differing in style of architecture as well as age.

The scene this June morning was, indeed, beautiful. The sun, like a happy memory, was shedding his radiance athwart and through the double archways towards the east, and touching with tender caress the old oaken joists which gave to so many of the houses their special claim to age and admiration. Sunlight illumined the little chapel of the quaint hospital founded by Elizabeth's favourite Leycester, making the numerous shields and coats of arms adorning the quadrangle as radiant as though the painter's hand had but newly left them.

As Tom Ronaldson hurried down Jewry Street, on his way to the Abbey, his thoughts harked back to the occasion of his last visit there. For a brief moment the glorious June sunshine merges into soft, clear moonlight, and Tom is again in the glades of Feringham Wood, as on that eventful morning more than thirty years before. How everything has changed since then, not merely his own life, but the life of the town itself! For Tom recalls scenes and doings which were but the preface to that series of events which ended in the banishment and death of the young Lord James Bagshot Warner.

In those, so-called, "good old days" of thirty years ago, when he and Tom were up with their company for the seven days' annual training (which was deemed all-sufficient for the members of the county Yeomanry Cavalry), the inhabitants of "sleepy old Hurstwick" were kept very wide awake, inconveniently and unpleasantly wide awake; indeed, they were scarcely permitted to indulge in the orthodox nightly snooze.

Till the early morning hours the respectable streets, sacred throughout the rest of the year to the tread of the half-dozen "Peelers" who constituted the borough police force, were scandalised by the rude awakening of echoes, which startled and alarmed the inmates of the antique dwellings.

Parties of young officers paraded the road-ways arm in arm, giving indubitable proof of their soundness of lung by the hoarse laughs, coarse jokes and ribald songs that rang out upon the night air. Not satisfied with a tour of the borough, these embryo defenders of their country became an attacking party. Knockers and bells, which ill-advised Hurstwickians had confidingly left to perform their usual office, were stormed and taken. "Peal after peal gave token" that a dozen bells were in the grasp of as many hands, and ere the sounds thus evoked could die away, a dozen more bells

were laid under contribution to produce music for these individuals, whose taste for *nocturnes* of this particular style appeared insatiable.

Then they would evince an uncontrollable desire to raise themselves above their surroundings, and many were the bets lost and won as to the ability of each, and all, to scale the borough lamp-posts, and extinguish the faint light they carried. Yes, those "good old days," when Ronaldson and his friends were in the hey-day of youth and folly, were of a past that could never return, and though here and there an old country nobleman might deplore the extinction of the wild spirit of a dead and gone generation, the modern Hurstwickian rejoiced in the certainty of peaceful nights, undisturbed slumbers, and whole knockers and bell-pulls.

How the old memories crowded upon the banker as he made his way up the beautiful drive leading to the Abbey! But he resolutely drove them away when, in response to his knock at the great oaken door, he was at once shown into the presence of the Marquis.

That the matter upon which he had been summoned was of no ordinary nature was evident to Tom as soon as his glance fell upon the nobleman. His fine and usually immobile features were no longer under their ordinary control; a faint twitching of the lips and eyebrows indicated the presence of high nervous excitation, but excitation whose full strength, if not already expended, was for the time being suppressed. To add to the importance of the situation Skelton, his lordship's family lawyer, was seen to be hurriedly leaving by an opposite door as Tom was ushered in.

Maintaining his ordinary attitude of courteous reserve, he advanced towards the table at which his

lordship was seated; but was astonished to see the old man rise to meet and greet him. Never before had the Marquis attempted to pass the barrier Tom had erected, but when to grave cordiality reproach was added, Tom could only be silent and await explanations.

"Ah, sir," the Marquis was saying, his tones and manner alike sad and weighty, "if only you had trusted

me, how different things would have been!"

Then, as Ronaldson regarded the speaker with questioning surprise, his lordship continued, "Yes, I repeat, had you but confided in me, I might have been able even then to atone for the past."

Still Tom was silent. Cautious always, perfect man of business as he was, he rarely hazarded even a remark; he required sure, if circumscribed, ground

upon which to base even an observation.

But his thoughts were not idle. Could it be possible that now, for the first time, the Marquis was about to refer to his share in that wager which ended so disastrously in the Feringham Wood affray? How could the matter have come to his ears? Tom must first learn the extent of his lordship's knowledge before he admitted anything. But the next words the Marquis uttered put caution to the right-about, and tore away the mask beneath which the banker hid himself.

"Why did you not come to me when your sister died? I would have spared neither time nor money

in seeking my lost Jim."

"Eleanor? Jim? What, what do you say?" Had the Marquis taken leave of his senses? Jim had been dead thirty years—ay! more. But his lord-ship, a very evident surprise in his tones, was saying, "Is it possible, then, that you, too, are in ignorance, that you ——?"

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"Explain yourself, my lord," interrupted Ronaldson, hoarsely, and with a touch of hauteur. "My sister is dead, I know to my sorrow, but I am here to defend her honour with my last breath."

For answer the Marquis turned to his writing-table, and taking from it a long blue envelope bearing a foreign postmark, as Tom could see (for he followed his companion's every movement with a keenness that was almost savage), put it into his hand, saying curtly t

"Sit down. Read!"

Mechanically Tom sat down and critically examined the sheet of foreign paper he drew from the envelope before setting himself to master its contents. The writing and style of address were evidently not those of a person of much education, and the matter of the communication appeared to bear no connection whatever with the nobleman's enigmatical remarks.

16, Ingersoll Street, Cape Town, May 10th, 1869.

To the Marquis of Pierhampton.

DEAR SIR,—The enclosed was found by Mrs. Glass among her late husband's papers. She did not find it until a few months ago, and being in poor circumstances and not rightly knowing what to do about it, kept it by her. When she named the matter to me I advised her to send it to you at once. She thinks the person who wrote it was for some months on the Island of Tristan in 1848 and 1849, but she is not sure. If so, he was lost at see, for one day the boat in which he used to go out to look for a ship came back empty. Mrs. Glass is now very old and feeble, and is unable to recollect the name of the gentleman. She wishes me to say that the paper is just as she found it, and she is sorry it was not found and sent before. But it was in a box with other papers which came from Tristan when she left the island and was never unpacked till a few months ago.—I remain, your lordship's obedient servant,

HARRIET HARRISS, for Mrs. GLASS
(widow of Governor Glass, late of Tristan D'Acunha.)

P.S.—It would be an act of charity if your lordship would remit postage to Mrs. Glass, for she is not well off now.—H. H.

What with What had all this to do with Eleanor!

Jim ! 1848 ! Why Jim had then been dead for more than ten years.

Tristan D'Acunha! Where on earth was that! Some island, was it not, in the South Atlantic ocean! Of course, he remembered sighting it on the way to New Zealand. Eleanor certainly was never there; indeed, she died that very year.

These thoughts passed rapidly through Ronaldson's mind as he gazed at the letter for some minutes after he had read and re-read it. Then, raising his eyes, with a questioning look, he found those of the

Marquis bent upon him.

"You are puzzled, I see," said the latter, "and I was wrong in supposing you had wilfully kept back facts with which I ought to have been made acquainted. That letter and this" (and his lordship held up a bulky packet) "reached me by last night's post. I will leave you alone to master the matter there set forth, for that it will prove of an agitating nature I am convinced. Old as I am, and fairly seasoned, perhaps hardened, to calamity, the story these pages disclose has proved almost too much for my strength."

With breaking voice the old man proceeded. "After a hasty perusal I sent at once for Skelton, and he has only now left me to return in an hour. By that time I trust you will have made yourself acquainted with the facts here narrated, and give us the benefit of your counsel."

The two men rose simultaneously, and as the Marquis held out the bulky letter-package his hand visibly trembled, and sobs, which he vainly endeavoured to repress, shook his frame. In another moment he was gone.

Alone, and with mingled foreboding and eagerness,

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Tom opened the package. On removing the outer envelope he found several old-fashioned broad sheets of letter-paper folded together, and addressed on the outer page (as in the thirties) to "The most noble The Marquis of Pierhampton, Hurstwick, England." The seals were but newly broken, but the paper was yellow with age, the ink upon it rapidly fading.

With something like dread Tom opened the sheets and turned them over to discover the name of the writer. Amazement, horror, hope, were alike represented in the unconsciously uttered exclamation as, after carrying the document to the window (for a mist seemed to have gathered about his eyes) he caught sight of the subscription, "James Bagshot Warner."

Then the mist about his eyes thickened, and his limbs trembled so violently that he was compelled to seat himself, and some minutes passed ere he could summon the courage and strength necessary to acquaint himself with this message from the dead. Yes, from the dead, for now he understood the connection between these pages and the note from Mrs. Glass. She had said the writer was drowned, and she was right, or he would have written again, or have returned to Hurstwick long since. Still no thought of Eleanor entered Ronaldson's mind as he smoothed out the sheets, which, spite of the thickness of the paper, were beginning to drop into holes where they had so long been folded.

The superscription was clear.

Tristan D'Acunha, South Atlantic Ocean, August 20th, 1848.

'48 and '69? Nearly twenty-one years ago Jim had penned these pages. No wonder Tom's eyes were



clouded and his heart heavy. Oh, the pity of it all! Jim, for love of whom he had made himself for so many years an object of ridicule, for fidelity to whom he had risked even a reputation for sanity, was actually alive the very year that Jack was born, the year that Eleanor died.

Ah! what was it the Marquis had said about Eleanor? With a quickening pulse Tom fumbled for an eyeglass he always carried, though rarely used, and having adjusted it read as follows:—

My Dear Father,—I scarcely know how to write with anything like coherence—I have so much to say. You will have heard how the mistake arose about my being on the Sultan, but alse! there is no mistake about my being banished here. I am, indeed, literally cut off from civilisation until a ship touches at the island, and here I have been for the past four months. Whether I shall see you first, or whether this reaches you after my departure or death, I do not know, but I can no longer delay writing.

Yet before I tell you how I come to be here at all, and news of a

Yet before I tell you how I come to be here at all, and news of a still more important nature, which makes my detention here nothing less than a terrible martyrdom, let me beg your forgiveness for that rash, that wicked vow I made on leaving Hurstwick. Gladly do I acknowledge once more my relationship to you, and, God helping me, on my return to Hurstwick will so act that you need never be ashamed to call me your son, and the son of my sainted

mother.

But now for the fact which makes every day, every night, every hour, every moment spent on this island an eternity of torment. At the end of last February I married (as you will before this, I trust, have learned from her own lips) Miss Eleanor Ronaldson, the only daughter of the Hurstwick banker, and sister of the great friend of my youth—Tom Ronaldson.

Here Tom unconsciously let the papers slip from his grasp, and for some moments seemed incapable of realising the true significance of this amazing disclosure.

"Eleanor marry Jim," he continued to repeat, and he struck his forehead more than once while he stared out of the window, unconscious of the beds

of scarlet geraniums and blue lobelia in the emerald setting of the trim lawn. For Memory had opened her portfolio of pictures, in one of which he saw himself, Lord Jim and Eleanor standing by the fireplace in the old schoolroom of the house in High Street. The girl, tall for her seventeen years, was listening with eager interest to the details of a practical joke her companions were proposing to play on the Whig candidate at the coming election.

Of course, Eleanor was his chum then, and Lord Jim chummed with her as much as with him. Yet she had never said she loved Jim; indeed, as Tom turned over picture after picture Memory presented to him, he found no token of "softness," as he would in that far-off time have spoken of love, on the part of either of them.

They must have met in America. How easy of solution was the mystery which had darkened so many long years, now that Tom held the key. Yet who could have imagined that Jim was alive ten years after the report of his death had been accepted? Then Ronaldson's thoughts reverted to the pair who had met to love, to marry, and to be for ever parted in the space of a few brief months.

The pathos, the irony, the cruelty of circumstance appealed to him with overwhelming force. The young husband eating out his heart in that enforced captivity, the young bride carried off by death before she had lost the hope of again seeing the father of her child; the son born into the world nameless and now homeless; the cruel slanders Eleanor had been called to bear; the incriminating mystery that had enveloped her ever since her marriage to this very moment—each and all craved attention and evoked bitter regret.

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Strong, hardened man of business as he was, Tom shudderingly recognised the might, the pitifulness of Destiny, and, as though himself physically beneath its power, sank on his knees, while sobs that would not be restrained broke from his heaving breast.

How long he remained in that position, a prey to grief and remorse, he never knew, but, aroused at length by an approaching footstep, he regained his feet. Turning, he found himself confronted by the Marquis. "I could not remain away any longer," he said; and then, moved by an uncontrollable impulse, the two men hid their faces from each other, speechless from excess of grief.

CHAPTER XVII.

Duly every morn
Thou climb'st the mountain-top, with eager eye
Exploring far and wide the watery waste
For sight of ship from England. Ev'ry speck
Seen in the dim horizon turns thee pale
With conflict of contending hopes and fears.
But comes at last the dull and dusky eve,
And sends thee to thy cabin well-prepared
To dream all night of what the day denied.

Cowper.

THE Marquis was the first to recover himself, though incapable for a time of walking or even standing without assistance.

"Have you read it all?" he at length managed to say in broken tones, while Tom hurriedly suppressed any further outward expression of his grief, and gently supported the old man to a chair.

"No, my lord, not yet; indeed, I have not read more than half-a-dozen sentences."

"Then, excuse me, will you go on to read it at once ? We can do nothing without your help, and you cannot help until you know all. So read, read, I beg. We have not a moment to lose if we are to find Jim and bring him home."

Tom feared that grief had upset the balance of the old man's mind, or he could never have indulged the chimerical idea of finding Jim alive after all these years. But he made no remark whatever as he lifted the yellow manuscript from the floor, and

scating himself at some distance from the Marquis, continued its perusal.

The first keenness of his surprise blusted by the knowledge that Jim was actually the husband of Eleanor, Ronaldson sought eagerly yet dispassionately for details of the circumstances which had led to the separation (if but for a brief period) of the newly-married couple. But he sought in vain. Allusions to the separation and to the circumstances which led to it recurred again and again, but were always either preceded or followed by such remarks as "Eleanor will have explained to you" or "Eleanor will have told you, so I will not recapitulate," and so on.

The manuscript was indeed more in the nature of a diary than a letter, and the entries for the most part were made at long intervals (especially towards the end), and with little or no attempt to explain anything except the circumstance which led to Jim's setting foot on Tristan d'Acunha. Often Ronaldson was unable to distinguish the words beneath his eye; the recital of Jim's grief at his enforced absence from Eleanor was heart-breaking, and would have melted the hardest nature. In fact, these lamentations made up the larger part of the whole production.

The last entry was dated November 10th, 1848, the very day, as Tom never forgot, of Eleanor's death.

No ship again; still fog, fog, interminable fog! Think, my dear father, what your feelings would be in such a case, and pity and comfort my darling! To-day I am more depressed than ever, the most God-forsaken creature in God's universe! Away in the lovely Californian Alps, where for days I never encountered a human being, I was never wretched as I am among these people, good and kind as they are. But then I had no wife, and to-day I feel that she needs me, that she is in distress with none to help her, and I, wretched, most miserable of men, cannot go to her. Ah, God! why hast Thou torn us from each other? Fool, fool that I was ever to leave her, ever to leave the Clysic, ever to set foot on

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this accursed island! I will be calm, though; the fine season is now close at hand—surely a ship will come to-morrow! Sometimes they approach, and then a gale will spring up and they hurry past and there is no possibility of reaching them, even with the boat which I always keep in readiness to put out. Every morning, as soon as it is light, I piece together the broken hope of yesterday, only to find it shattered into a thousand fragments ere night falls. Every day when it is fine I climb the cliffs and the Cone; and when they are shrouded in mist I stand on the shore ready to launch out at the first signs of an approaching vessel. But I will write no more. It hurts me to write, it hurts me not to write. My old friend Tom was to be back at Hurstwick this month. Tell him, with my love, to have his hair cut at once—no good comes of vow-making or keeping. Vows are simply gyves which never give as one grows. Would to God I had never made one! May hey to your tenderest care I again commend her, my dear father.—Your affectionate and suffering son,

By a very strong effort Ronaldson prevented the moisture that had gathered in his eyes from falling, and, turning over page after page, set himself to extract the salient facts, either definitely set forth or implied.

So far as he could follow the manuscript it would seem that "Lord Jim" and Eleanor met in New York and were married just before the latter left that city for the little settlement at Patricia. That for some unexplained reason Jim had left his newly-made bride to go—where? Presumably to New Zealand, as Eleanor had given the Misses Barnard to understand. But the MS. was silent on that point and also as to the business calling him to that colony.

The MS., however, gave the circumstances which led to the bridegroom's detention at Tristan d'Acunha. It appeared that Jim had begged the captain of the Clytie, if opportunity occurred, to land him for a few hours on the island that he might examine, if possible, the geological formation of the Cone, its chief feature, particulars of which he had promised to furnish to a

Mr. Dawson, whom he referred to as a Canadian geologist of some repute. Through stress of weather the captain, who had promised not to leave the neighbourhood till night (no ship could approach the beach), had been compelled to signal the boat which had carried Jim to the island, and the hands, finding he was away climbing with Governor Glass, returned without him.

Another fact, and one that in some measure explained Eleanor's apparently singular lack of anxiety on her husband's account, was supplied by the MS. Jim had written to her since sailing, and had been able to forward his letter by a passing vessel before the Clytic reached Tristan. In that letter (evidently addressed to Patricia) it was manifest he had given her to understand that his return might be delayed by the native war in New Zealand; and further had instructed her to proceed to Hurstwick not later than October. Should her brother not have reached home by that time Eleanor was to go direct to the Marquis and tell him everything.

Ah, cruel Fate! The pity of it all, pity too deep for words, too solid for tears!

When Ronaldson had ceased for some minutes to turn the pages he still held, the Marquis, who had closely watched his every movement for the past hour, rose from his chair and, as the banker remained entirely oblivious of his presence, advanced and seated himself beside him.

On perceiving the old man Tom started, and, removing his eyeglass, commenced to blow his nose vigorously, while the Marquis, possessing himself of the manuscript, pointed to its concluding statement—"Your affectionate and suffering son."

"You ought to know, Ronaldson," he said, "it is my duty to tell you before we go further into this sad business, that but for my cruelty, my heartlessness, Jim would never have been an outcast or a wanderer, need never have concealed his marriage. Foolish he was, thoughtless I know, but not wicked. He came to me one night in sore trouble, and I—God forgive me!—hounded him from me like a dog—yes, and disowned him! That is why he remained away so many years; that is why your sister kept her marriage a secret; that is why I am a lonely, heartbroken old man to-day."

And the speaker completely gave way again, his spare frame shaking like a leaf, so mighty was the tempest of his emotion. Tom, alarmed for the consequences of this terrible agitation, hastily interposed with the story of his own share in this disastrous business.

"But it was I, my lord, who laid the wager with Jim. Had it not been for me he would never have been in Feringham Wood that night, would never have needed to come to you for help. I know, for Jim told me," continued Ronaldson, as the Marquis raised his head from his hands and gazed inquiringly at the speaker, "all about his interview with you. But I am not less guilty than you of all the trouble and misery that has resulted from that night's folly."

"Ah, you were foolish, wild, perhaps wicked," returned the nobleman, gravely; "but you were not Jim's father; you were under no solemn obligation to God and to his mother for his well-being, body and soul. I was, and sinner that I am "—and the venerable man's voice gained in strength as he unfalteringly proclaimed his guiltiness—"I shamefully neglected

that trust and even disowned my son. God grant, Ronaldson, that you may never know remorse, sorrow such as mine! When I look back upon those years of self-indulgence I can only think I must have been possessed by the devil himself. My God! what have I not lost, what have I not suffered! That the Marquisate will pass on my death or Arthur's—and he, I am told, will go first—from the Warner family, unless, indeed, Jim be now living, is but a part of my punishment, and I accept it as deserved, though I bitterly deplore it."

"But there is Jack!" cried Ronaldson, for the first time recognising the one bright, blessed boon

amongst these abounding troubles.

"Jack? Jack who?" cried the Marquis, sharply.
"Why Jack, Eleanor's son, Jim's son. Ah! I

see now why she insisted upon his being called John," concluded the banker, musingly, while his eye brightened. "With her last breath she intimated that the

child should be named after you, sir."

"For God's sake explain yourself," cried his lordship. "I thought you said you knew nothing about this marriage, and now you tell me there is a son and that he is named after me. What does it all mean?"

"There was a child, my lord, and now that I know the truth I can trace a very distinct likeness in him

to his father."

"Heaven be praised!" ejaculated the old man. "This is mercy, mercy I had not dared to hope for. Where is the lad? Fetch him at once that I may clasp him to my heart! A handsome fellow like my Jim? But how is it Skelton did not tell me? Naturally the first question I asked him was, 'Is there a child?' Explain! I am too old to be trifled with."

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"Mr. Skelton would not have heard of his existence," returned Ronaldsen, "for though Eleanor's death was publicly notified in Hurstwick the week after it took place, no mention was made of the child. It was impossible to publish its birth until we could give the name of its father. I've worked every possible clue, I've travelled half over the world in the hope of finding my sister's husband. Unfortunately, I never went to this island, this Tristan d'Acunha, 1200 miles from everybody. Would to God I, too, had been stranded there!"

"But the boy, what did you do with him?" asked the Marquis, with a vain effort to appear calm.

"Brotherton (he was my sole confidant and adviser) and I agreed it would be best to let him remain where he was until the father turned up. I felt so certain he would discover himself, or be discovered, that I said I would not see my nephew until I could greet him by his true surname, but I was forced to break that resolve."

"By what name has he been known?" was the nobleman's next enquiry.

And then he had to listen to the long history of Ronaldson's experiences in his search for the missing parent, to the difficulties Miss Barnard had made for him by insisting that he was not the brother of Eleanor, to the recital of the hostility manifested by the young man when uncle and nephew met for the first time last August, hostility that culminated in the latter's sudden disappearance from Heather's Edge.

"Good God, Ronaldson!" exclaimed the Marquis, in angry reproach, "you don't mean to say you've let him slip away without knowing where you could

reach him at an hour's notice? Surely we have not found the father only to lose the son?"

"Jack is searching for his father, my lord," returned Ronaldson, the gloom of his face lightened for a moment, "but where I know not. I've been an arrant fool," he continued, lapsing into despondence. "My nephew demonstrated that fact last summer. In my desire to screen Eleanor's name from the tongue of scandal I preserved a silence which has proved louder, more fierce than any slanderous voice. boy was furious when he learned for the first time last August of the secrecy I had observed with respect to his birth, and more furious still that I had dared to make use of the name 'Jones' as his and his mother's. He fiercely demanded of Miss Barnard (as she herself told me later) why I had not advertised for particulars of his mother's marriage, why I had not impressed the whole world into the search for his father? God helping him, he said, the world should know whom his mother married, for he would search until he found the man."

"Noble fellow!" ejaculated the Marquis, greatly affected. "It is his mother speaking through him, sir."

"It must be, my lord, and that thought has alone kept alive the hope that he will not only succeed where I have failed, but that he may in the end forgive my blunders and accord me some measure of esteem."

"But what has he to live on; he can't prosecute this search without money?"

Then the banker detailed the young man's plans as he had received them by letter and word of mouth from the Misses Barnard, for on learning that Jack had not been to Geneva, as he had surmised. Ronaldson had gone over at once to Heather's Edge to make further inquiries. "He is a capital linguist, my lord, and as, by my desire, his vacations have been spent in different places on the Continent, he is singularly well equipped for the post of travelling-tutor, a post he told one of the Misses Barnard he should endeavour to obtain. He hoped to save sufficient in a year or two to undertake his mission, and trusted he might meet with an appointment which would eventually bring him to New York."

"The fellow has grit," observed the nobleman, admiringly. "He wouldn't have your money?"

"No, my lord; he said he would rather break stones on the road than touch a penny of it. So low have I fallen, or rather so low do I lie in his regard. In justice to myself, though, I ought to tell you that Miss Barnard attributes much of his animosity towards me to the fact that I am opposed to an attachment he has formed with a girl in that neighbourhood. When I heard from Miss Barnard how ill-fitted she was in every respect to be Jack's wife, I begged her to use her efforts to break off the intimacy."

"And she told Jack how you felt about it, I sup-

pose?" observed the nobleman, drily.

"She did, my lord," returned Ronaldson, somewhat disconcerted by the other's manner. "The girl is partly French, so Miss Barnard said, and lowly born. She was anxious to show me her certificate of birth to prove that she did not speak without the book; but I told her it was quite unnecessary for me to see it. And now that we know Jack to be your grandson, my lord, it is more important than ever that the affair should be broken off."

"I'm not so sure of that," was the unlooked-for

rejoinder, "and I haven't the same amount of faith as yourself in this Miss Barnard. It strikes me that though she may now and then take a five-barred gate, she is more likely to come a cropper at an anthill. You have seen this girl, I suppose?" And the keen eyes of the old man looked mercilessly into those of the banker.

"No, no, my lord. Well no, I've not seen the girl, but she is of no position, and there's not the slightest doubt it is largely on her account that Jack is determined to find his father."

"All honour to Jack and the girl then. She is so worthy that he will not, dares not offer her anything that is false; not even a false surname. Ah, sir, having seen my grandson you should have known that he could not care for a vain, silly creature; his devotion to his mother's memory should have taught you that. But much may yet be repaired. Go, see this girl for yourself, and if she be such an one as I believe her to be, bring her here. She shall tell us all she knows of Jack, and you and I may shortly have him with us to cheer our last days. Mine can only be few at the most, for last week I passed my seventyfifth birthday; you, I trust, have many years in store. But go, go at once to this place, and come again to me with news of the lad. Ah, here is Skelton at . last," and the nobleman turned as the lawyer entered, apologies upon his lips.

He had been making inquiries about Tristan d'Acunha, and putting engines to work to discover every scrap of information respecting Miss Ronaldson's marriage.

"Congratulate me, Skelton, I am a grandfather, and have been for more than twenty years, though I

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knew it not. Ronaldson, too, was ignorant of the name of his sister's husband, so we have both had our trials. He's going now to find the lad, and you and I must——"

"But have you—excuse me, my lord—but have you your sister's marriage certificate?" inquired the lawyer, anxiously. And when Ronaldson had to reply in the negative, Skelton said, cheerily, "Oh, we'll have it before long; we must publish all the facts we're in possession of at once. We have the name of the ship, the Clytie; there will probably be passengers still living who remember the circumstance that one of their number was left at Tristan d'Acunha. We are not, of course, aware that Lord Jim travelled under his title, or what name he used. But we must have the facts we are in possession of published, my lord. The publication of facts breeds facts, and we want all we can get, for there is the heir-apparent to be met."

"Ah, yes; but it is the heir himself I want to meet."

"I'll go straight away to Heather's Edge, my lord," said Ronaldson, rising.

"Ay, that's right, and if you don't find him there telegraph; but be sure you bring the young lady back with you, and "—here the Marquis lowered his voice—"make use of the scissors before you call on her."

CHAPTER XVIII.

It is better to stir a question without deciding it, than to decide it without stirring it.

Never cut what you can untie.

JOUBERT.

SELF-SHORN, and therefore somewhat apprehensive of the criticism of Miss Barnard's eyes and tongue, Tom Ronaldson would gladly have welcomed the worst they were capable of than have found no Miss Barnard. But when he reached Heather's Edge the bright, roomy cottage was closed, the blinds drawn down, and front and back doors fast locked. What could be the reason? Had she gone to reside with her But, on arriving at Davesister at The Gap? nant's house he found that also deserted. Now. thoroughly alarmed, he drove to the vicarage and learned from Mr. Cartwright's successor there that The Gap had been untenanted ever since Davenant's wedding last October. "The old housekeeper died at the end of September, and Miss Davenant wasn't looking at all well. Probably it is on her account they are staying away, but I assure you we want Miss Davenant badly on Sundays; indeed, my wife quite misses her, she had taken a great liking for her."

Then Ronaldson inquired for Miss Barnard and heard, to his unbounded astonishment, that she and her servant went abroad at the end of February. "Abroad?" echoed Tom, suspicion and incredulity

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about equally blended in his intonation. Could she and the Davenants have joined Jack somewhere? "What could induce a woman of her age to go abroad?"

"She is no ordinary woman," responded the vicar, a twinkle in his eye; "moreover, she is reputed to have a snug little sum in the bank. I must own I admire her pluck in venturing out to see the world. Of all disagreeable people commend me to the miserly female."

Then, noting the banker's evident annoyance, the vicar inquired if he could assist him in any way.

The two men had never met before, but as Ronaldson replied, "I hardly think so, thank you," he regarded his questioner attentively, and, satisfied he was a man who might safely be trusted with a confidential communication, continued, "Yet I may as well tell you my business, if you are good enough to spare me half an hour. You are doubtless aware, sir, that my only nephew, indeed, my only surviving relative, was born at Heather's Edge and lived with the Misses Barnard until he was fourteen."

The vicar regarded his companion with a puzzled air. "Nephew?" he echoed, questioningly, "only near relative? My dear sir, if you are referring to the young fellow who was here for a few days last August and whom I only saw at church, I am bound in duty to tell you that I have always been led to understand he was and is your son."

Tom did not flinch, neither did he manifest any surprise at this statement. He remembered that Lord Clanfalkland last summer had bestowed an aggravatingly benign glance upon him as he listened to the banker's announcement of his intention to adopt the handsome young fellow he called his nephew. Looks must be ignored, unless one would subject himself to the dictum, "qui s'excuse s'accuse," but a man can be forced to eat his words or apologise for them.

"May I ask your authority for that lie?" was Ronaldson's quiet rejoinder.

"My dear sir," returned the vicar, nonplussed by the other's coolness, "does not the boy bear your name, while the register in the coffer yonder attests the fact that he is the son of Thomas and Eleanor Ronaldson, of Hurstwick?"

"His mother, nevertheless, was my only sister; there she lies," and Tom indicated by a wave of the hand the grave which was distinctly visible from the vicarage window—"her life the price of her child's."

"My dear sir," repeated the clergyman, again taken aback, "do you mean to infer that the Eleanor Jones who lies there was the mother of the young man called Ronaldson? Her death I had been led to understand was brought about by the overturning of the post-chaise as she was posting from Sheafland to Denby."

"Impossible!" cried Tom, with evident chagrin, for he had never conceived, amidst all the difficulties that had dogged his endeavours to put matters right, that Eleanor should be dissociated from her own child. Verily, he had been a prince among muddlers and merited all the reproaches that Jack and the Marquis had more or less covertly launched at him. What with his own, and Miss Martha's tinkerings, it seemed highly probable that Jack's identity would be difficult to establish. First a Ronaldson, then a Jones, what court of law would listen to evidence in support of his claim to the name of Warner? Why had he—

Tom—meddled with the grave? Why not have left time and circumstance to elucidate all that was mysterious? Why have "patched up" a name, as Miss Barnard had remarked, "for the public to swallow"? Would it ever be possible to establish Eleanor's identity, even now, with the wife of Lord James Bagshot Warner? Ronaldson turned hot and cold as he remembered that in the church register which gave the dates of her death and burial she bore the name of Jones.

And this amplification of the careless driving of the postboy into a cause of death, must surely have had its origin in the mouth of Miss Barnard, who, Tom now remembered, had been annoyed (so Brotherton had said) that a child should have been born in her house.

The two men were standing at the open window through which the June sunshine and the perfume of June roses, visible and invisible tokens of the Divine, in silent, irresistible strength made their way. Perhaps they brought comfort and hope to poor puzzled Tom.

"Come with me," he said, his tones tense and hoarse.
"Come with me to my sister's grave. There you shall hear her tragic story; there, sir, shall you acknowledge that a wife and brother were the victims of a set of circumstances as singular as they were cruel!"

Hands were grasped and warmly pressed when the recital which had deeply affected both teller and listener was concluded. The vicar spoke hopefully. He thought that so long as the Misses Barnard were alive their evidence as to the boy's relationship to the lady who bore the name of Jones would be accepted in any court of law." "I should have thought, indeed, I have always thought," observed Ronaldson, "that the whole countryside was in possession of the actual fact that my sister was Jack's mother.'

"Twenty years ago, sir, as I can prove by the statistics I have collected for a history of the parish," remarked the vicar, "this place was but a scattered hamlet, neighbours often four, five, and sometimes as many as ten miles apart from each other. Communication was then a difficult matter, especially in winter, and these people accepting the first statement of any set of circumstances, would cling to it as veritable truth, unless it were unmistakeably proved untrue. I should not be at all surprised if it turned out that your little nephew never appeared in the village until he was five or six years old, and my parishioners would never think of connecting him with the lady whose grave Miss Mary Barnard (I should say Mrs. Davenant) had visited so faithfully (as I am told) for so long a period."

"Well, I will ask you," said Ronaldson, as the two men returned to the vicarage, "to let the truth be known to your parishioners as soon as possible. Now I must be off. As you can give me no news either of Jack's, or Miss Barnard's, or the Davenants' whereabouts, I shall go direct to Switzerland to M. Vernet. He may have seen or heard from my nephew by this time. Should you have anything to com municate please send direct to the Marquis of Pier hampton, Hurstwick."

"By the bye," observed the vicar, as he relinquished the banker's hand, "I have an idea that someone was making inquiries in the village about your sister just a year ago. I was not at home, but he——" "Jim!" cried Ronaldson, his usual caution at once deserting him, "it will have been Jim!"

"Not so fast, my dear friend; the stranger in all probability was only a summer visitor, of whom I should have heard nothing had he not asked to see the registers. As I was away (I always keep them locked up) he did not see them."

Tom drew a long breath. "Where can I hear more of this stranger?"

"Davidson, our clerk, will tell you all there is to be known; the gentleman stayed one night at his cottage."

"I'll go at once and see him; we can't afford to ignore trifles. No, I can get lunch in town or on board, thanks."

Leaping into the waiting gig Ronaldson and its driver were soon white with the summer dust raised by the rapid hoof-falls of the fleetest horse Denby owned. But the banker spent half-an-hour with Davidson.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

There life is easiest unto man; no snow Or wintry storm or rain at any times Is there, but evermore the ocean sends Soft breathing airs of zephyr to refresh The habitants.

HOMER.

ONE evening in Easter week, some two months or more before the arrival at Hurstwick of that important document from Tristan d'Acunha, a solitary cance, manned by natives, passed through the opening in the barrier-reef surrounding the small island of San Juan Baptista in the South Pacific. Beneath the graceful cocoa-nut trees which fringed the shore, a tall man, bronzed by travel till he was of almost the same complexion as the dusky rowers, sprang, carpet-bag in hand, on to the white glittering beach.

Bestowing a guerdon, which literally called forth volumes of gratitude from the recipients, the traveller immediately struck out for the hill beyond, and was presently lost to sight among the elegant Barringtonias and Ti trees which clothed its sides. For a time the swish, swish of the oars, and the song of the rowers, as they returned to their homes at the

easternmost end of the island, were distinguishable above the thunder of the mighty ocean waves, and the pronounced, though inaudible contempt of the equally mighty barrier reef they assailed. They never ceased their efforts to move that silent bar. One moment they would lash it with terrific violence, the next in abject, mock abasement would toss upon its crest an avalanche of pearls and diamonds which, shattered on the impact, were flung back with the music of breaking crystal.

Apart from this eternal conflict around it the island was singularly quiet and deserted this April evening of 1869. Yet when the solitary pedestrian emerged from the belt of trees surrounding the summit, and came in full view of the native settlement upon the table-land beyond, he evinced no surprise at the absence of all tokens of active life.

Turning along a small pathway, which skirted the eminence to the left, he came to a stand on the verandah of a tiny dwelling-house commanding the broad expanse of waters, which, as the sun declined, looked like the immense pallet of some giant painter, so wondrously did the murky, restless element entangle and separate the crimson beams now flung athwart it.

The frame-cottage, plastered and white-washed with lime from the coral rocks, was apparently unoccupied, for a call from the new arrival elicited no response, and an examination of its four small rooms found them untenanted. But in one a spotless cloth was laid with pickled fish, ripe bananas, yams, and fresh cocoa-nut milk, the whole presenting such a tempting appearance it was small wonder the traveller yielded to the mute invitation, and discussed, with evident appreciation, the good things provided. As

he did so his eyes fell upon two envelopes lying on the table, each bearing English stamps and the address "J. B. Warner, Esq."

Their contents afforded the reader manifest satisfaction, and his repast ended, he rose and, lighting a cigar, proceeded towards the verandah. On the way thither he paused before a crucifix, the sole object on the walls. Attentively regarding it for a moment he turned to his carpet-bag, and took therefrom a small scroll which, by rolling out from the inside, became flat and readable, for its rescript was set forth in large and gilded type.

"I wonder whether the padre would mind," said the man, tentatively, as he produced four drawing-pins, with the evident intention of nailing the scroll beside the crucifix; "they ought to go together."

But the brief soliloquy was abruptly broken off, and scroll and pins flung down at the sound of a familiar footstep, while, turning hastily, the tall, bronzed man almost fell into the outstretched arms of a short, spare, eager-faced priest advancing through the doorway. Hands long sundered were grasped with a warmth and strength of feeling which spread to the very finger-tips, and "eyes looked love to eyes that spake again," for hearts were too full for other speech.

"Ah! hiji mio, bienvido, bienvido/" at length broke from the elder man. "Now am I ready to say my Nunc Dimittis/"

"Nunc dimittis?" echoed the other in tender derision. "Nay, nothing of that sort for years to come. Why, padre mio, I can no more do without you now than I could twenty years ago. Indeed, I

have come here now with the express purpose of carrying you away from this place instanter!"

Padre Geronimo Encarnacion slowly shook his head, though eye and smile irradiated the worn countenance.

"But I mean it," continued the younger man, with decision. "You work too hard. I can see signs all over you of an imperative need for rest and change. Besides," and here, though the two spoke entirely in Spanish, the voice was lowered, "I am not at all comfortable about you since news came of the way those brutes treated good Bishop Patteson at Nupaka the other day. I have dreaded to take up a newspaper of late lest I should read some such announcement as this: 'The devoted Padre Geronimo Encarnacion, who has laboured so faithfully on the island of San Juan Baptista for the past ten years, was cruelly——'"

"Ah! no, my son, my dear Jacobo; our people are not like those. Yet, if God will. No, no, my people are good and kind; they would not hurt me. As you would see, they were all at Vespers to-night—babies and all. And last Sunday—ah, I wish you could have seen the young ones in their white robes making their first Communion! And it is thou, my son, who hast wrought this great good for them and me!"

"I? I? I, my father? I, the heretic? What can you be thinking about?"

"I am thinking what is quite right," returned the priest, with an emphasizing nod. "But we shall walk a little and I will show you how true are my words." And the two passed out, and linking arms, paced up and down the white coral pathway in front of the

verandah, where the breeze came direct from the ocean.

"Do you not see, hiji mio, that if you had not interfered at San Carlos when I was foolishly trying to die I could not have done this work I love so much. To you, therefore, these people and I, under God, owe all."

"That is one way of shelving responsibility and honour, my father," returned the younger man,

lightly.

Then, still lightly, but with the lightness that reveals great deeps, he added, "And where, padre mio, should I have been without your self-sacrificing aid? How could I, helpless as I was, have shipped myself and the gold from Monté Rey? Who, but yourself, tended me during that tempestuous voyage to New York? Who was it that never left me till I seemed fairly started on the highway to happiness?" A quiet joy shone from the old man's eyes, while he vainly endeavoured to cut short his companion's recital. "Nay, I am by far the larger debtor," continued the latter, "for who but yourself nursed me through that five years' nightmare of sorrow at Upolu when I, too, foolishly tried to die."

"Ah, but, my son, for you there was excuse: God's hand was heavy upon you."

At these words a stern look crept to the face of the younger man—the look a man's face wears when his dearest friend is subjected to passing, if unintentional, insult; the look of a man at "guard," ready to strike, yet loth to attack one whose friendship he values and whose armour he deems worthless. No, he would not draw, but it was with unmistakable relief he saw Juan de Dios (for such was the self-chosen baptismal

name of the padre's native servant) approach and engage his master's attention.

Rightly or wrongly, James Bagshot Warner's whole nature revolted against the universal practice of heathendom and Christendom alike, to foist their troubles, their sins, and even the punishment of sins, upon their Deity. If one sowed the wind, was it not reasonable to expect the whirlwind? One had one's choice of seeds, and one was free to sow or not to sow.

As these thoughts passed rapidly through Warner's mind he became aware that night, with tropical suddenness, had descended, that the stars in lustrous beauty and with noiseless footfall had stepped on to the deep blue vault above, and at sight of them the light of joy kindled upon his face until it was as the face of an angel. For his intense love and appreciation of all created things, far keener now than in his Californian days, was but a rivulet from the sea of his passionate love and devotion to their and his Creator. A very Parsee this man in his chivalrous treatment of all that is earthy, for the Divine impress was never obscured to his earnest, loving gaze. The beauty, the potentiality of the earth were to him an eternal source of wondering joy and reverence; always there was "the hiding of His power," and more obvious still the tokens of His tenderness and providence. The Maker of beauties and blessings so transcendent, the Author and Contriver of the many sorrows he had experienced? Away with the thought!

Yet one could not (he, least of all) be angry with the padre, a man whose hand had never rested heavily either on saint or sinner. What is that he is saying at this moment to Juan de Dios? "Es necesario amar á todo el mundo, hasta á nuestros enemigos."*
Surely he was a man after God's own heart. And, so thinking, Warner re-entered the little frame-house with "En poco tiempo mi padre."† Picking up the fallen scroll, its inscription, "Every man must bear his own burden," coinciding so exactly with his own theory and experience of life, he replaced it in his portmanteau and proceeded to an adjoining room for a wash and brush up.

Meanwhile, Juan de Dios having departed, the padre's thoughts recurred to the interrupted conversation as he paced up and down the little pathway.

Ah, who in all the world had suffered as Jacobo had suffered? The old priest knew by heart every paragraph in his well-thumbed "Lives of the Saints" and, while he acknowledged the trials there recorded were great and manifold, entitling each saint to the martyr's crown, he privately confessed their sufferings to be as the fine dust of the balance in comparison with the heavy burden of sorrow this man had borne. From that eventful night when as the Señor James, Jim has appeared to the padre in the church of San Carlos right on to the present moment, the two had never lost touch, though often separated, as on this last occasion, for five years or so.

What a history, thought the priest, as circumstance after circumstance passed rapidly through his mind, a history which, if inserted in the "Lives of the Saints," would be regarded as savouring more of tradition than truth. Yet how terribly true it was, as true as eventful! What an undertaking the shipping of that gold!

^{* &}quot;We must love everybody, even our enemies," † Presently,

As the padre recalled it he saw again the tiny cell, the insensible Englishman, the gold-strewn floor, the charred bedding. Then his eye kindled with the light which illumines the face of a skilful general when he looks back on some successful strategic movement, as he reviewed his tactics on that occasion.

Surely he was aided by our Blessed Lady of Sorrows, whose heart is ever full of pity for the helpless and distressed. How else could he, a weak, insignificant priest, have conceived such a scheme for saving this man and his gold—this man, who was then almost a stranger, but now, heretic though he was, his very dear son?

Yes, it certainly was a scheme that any man, even a big general, might be proud of, and there was so little time and so much, so very much gold. Afterwards he had had the help of some devoted Indians, but the scheme was all his own. True, a Spanish ship was in the harbour just then, and the captain of it, a good Catholic, was quite willing to take, for a small sum, a poor priest and his sick friend who were fleeing from the heretic Yankees. The little town, too, was empty, all the men folk, both invaders and invaded, away South at Los Angeles and San Diego, and the American vessels which thad filled Monté-Rey Bay in July were down South too. So that, after all, it was not such a difficult matter to get right off when one was outside San Carlos as it might have been.

Indeed, if it had not been for that gold the Englishman was so anxious to send to someone, there would have been no difficulty. But there was the gold, and certainly it should not be left for the heretic who had bought the sacred Mission, and would soon pull down the holy church and destroy all it contained.

And then our Blessed Lady of Sorrows had said, "Take with you the Madonna, and the Holy Child, also San Juan de Capristano. See, you can hide them, one in each of the unburnt sacks, and with the gold about them they will travel safely, and their presence will be to you a blessing." Then she had pointed to the burnt bedding and bid him stuff the rest of the gold into the mattress with some straw. How his fingers had ached, for it was necessary to patch the burnt parts, and cover all over with some old hides he had discovered in an outhouse. All the time the Englishman lay on the floor, the cushion upon which the crucifix usually rested in the church beneath his head. Better the sick man has it than the rough, rude Yankee.

Then, when after much pains the mattress of gold and straw is finished, with great reverence the Madonna and Child and San Juan de Capristano were lifted from their pedestals and inserted in the centre (one in each) of the two whole sacks. When the "specimens" Jim had placed in the mouth were removed there was ample room for the sacred images, and when they, too, had been hide-bound and the nuggets put in the Señor James' box (the key of which was taken from his neck and replaced there) but little time remained.

The final sweepings up of the yellow grains made good payment for the voyage. And now that all is finished three devoted Indians, who (spite of the Government edict) would not accept their independence and were always within hail, were called. They are informed that a sick man who came for shelter must be carried down to the *Hispania* that night. As payment for their services they must each take one of the

stranger's three beasts. The padre recalls with a thrill the last time he entered the church of San Carlos, how, after prostrating himself before it, he raised the heavy rood beneath which he had so lately sought to sacrifice his life. Asking pardon for the daring act, he fixed another cross-piece near the lower end of the upright, and with shuddering thankfulness extracted the cruel, headless, bloodstained nails. For the rood shall be the stretcher upon which the sick man on the hard mattress shall be conveyed to the vessel.

What a tramp, tramp that was in the darkness and the rain! Three miles of it, and all in profound silence. It might have been a corpse those bearers carried, so still lay the figure beneath its rough tarpaulin covering, his trunk with the nuggets at his feet, the sacred cushion beneath his head. Monté-Rey was deserted, and the heavy rain muffled the hoof-falls of the two beasts, which carried each a sack with its rich and sacred contents.

"'I take with me,' I said to the captain of the Hispania, 'the Holy Mother of God and San Juan de Capristano. See, I have packed them well in the sand of our country that so they shall not be injured. I will not that they be left to fall into the hands of the heretic, and they will bring you good winds.'"

"Bueno, bueno, and this, then, is your sick friend?" So all was well.

But when Jacobo and his belongings were safely aboard, and the captain had crowded all sail, and favoured by a nor'wester, had rounded Point Pinos unmolested, Geronimo Encarnacion's work was not over.

This Señor James had crept into the desolate heart

of the poor priest, and his weakness and helplessness made powerful appeals to the innate tenderness and devotion of the man. He would not leave the Señor until he should be strong enough to care and do for himself; and perhaps (quien sabe?) our Blessed Lady, who had helped him already so much, would give him the joy of saving the soul of this young, fine man. So determined, the padre found no difficulty in refusing a very pressing offer made by the Mission Bishop of Hawaii, where the vessel called, to remain and work in his diocese. He promised, however, that later on he would, if spared, return; and the bishop struck by the evident suitability of the man for a life of hardship and unquestioning service, was fain to be content.

Poor Jacobo did not make much progress; he seemed to have no wish to live. The heart of the padre was very sad in those days, and he remembered now how often, as he had paced the deck of that vessel, he had thought to himself that the young Señor below, who had so miraculously interposed to save him from death, was himself slowly dying beneath some heavy invisible rood. How he longed to be able to remove that weighty, impalpable burden.

The captain was a very holy man, and was sure that the Madonna and San Juan had brought him good luck, so he told the padre where he might find good, clean lodgings on the quay at New York Harbour.

"My men shall carry for you the sacred images and the bed of your sick friend, but, Holy Mother of God! what a hard one it is!"

And so the voyagers were safely housed in strange, poor, but clean quarters. Yet Jacobo did not grow strong for months and months, and all that time the

two were busy extracting the gold from the straw in the mattress, and re-arranging it that no suspicion of its enormous value should excite the curiosity of the landlady. Ah, that was a dreary time, and what a tiring, tiresome business to separate and collect the gold.

And Jacobo will not venture out, so on the padre fell all the business of seeking a place for this great wealth. "Jacobo was feverishly anxious to be rid of it, so I go myself to see the man at the head of the American Treasure House, and he comes to our lodgings and brings with him a young lawyer. They ask many questions of Jacobo. Jacobo tells them where this gold was found, and they look at each other and nod wisely. Then they say, 'We will take care of this for you, and for every hundred pounds will give you £3 10s. each year.' Jacobo says, 'Bueno, but I will that you assay and weigh it here, and that you keep it until the woman Sarah Bennett or her child shall ask it of you. These nuggets keep for me until I want them.'

"So they agreed, and when the dust and nuggets have been tried and weighed, then it is found that Jacobo has more than £7,000, and the woman nearly twice as much! Jacobo says he will at once go to New Zealand and find and tell her of this great fortune, but he is still very weak, and on the way to ask about a ship he slips and breaks his leg. So we go again back to our lodgings, and there Jacobo must stay till the leg is well joined. Then it was that the Battery, and the Bowery, and Five Points were thronged with the gaunt, pale Irish, who, because they had no potatoes to eat in their own country, the English must send them to America to get food. Poor creatures! And Jacobo was so sorry for them. He did not care much to live in those days. His gold he cared not for.

"'Let the Irish have it, caro padre mio,' he would

say, 'and take much for yourself.'

"But I would have him well. I would have him go to his father, the marchese. Then one day came the beautiful English Señorita Ronaldson, a heretic, but full of goodness for the poor Catholics. Yes, she soon was el amigon with me, and then I ask her to come and see her compatriot who had broken his leg, but whose heart was still more broken. She came, and very soon the broken heart was mended, and then Jacobo no longer needs the old mad padre.

"I could see how they loved each other, and my heart was glad. It was better so, better he should go back to the noble Inglese his father and all be happy. And I had my mission work. The Yankees, too, said that no more would they permit the poor Irish to land on their shores, so what better could I do than go to Hawaii to the good bishop who wanted me?

"And Jacobo will go at once, since he is well, to New Zealand, so that Sarah Bennett shall know about the gold waiting for her. And the Señorita says, 'Yes, go quickly, and you will find my brother there, and it will be well that you go back to England with him. As for me I will finish my work with my protégées, and the padre Jones will take me safely back, and I shall be there at home to welcome you both.'

"Ah, yes, and how good it would have been if what she wished had been done. But Jacobo, when he has found a very fast ship that will go from Boston, he loves so much the Señorita that before he goes he begs her to marry, that so he may call her his very own. And in those last hours she can deny him nothing.

So at Boston the day before his ship leaves they marry. Marry—and the day after they part! Ah, God! What brightness, what sweetness, what prospects of delight!

"They would come to see me at my station some day, they said. Ah, me! It was at the end of February they marry, and fifteen months after Jacobo did indeed land at my station. But—well, no, not to-night; one must not even think of it."

"¿De qué se trata padre mio?" cried Warner, breaking in upon his friend's reverie from the verandah. "What is going on down there?" he repeated, as shouts and laughter ascended from the beach, above which the moon had now risen in tranquil beauty.

Hurrying down the little pathway to a point from whence a good view of the shore was obtainable, the two men paused while the padre exclaimed, "It is the march of the mali'o to-night."

"Ah, let us go down," said the other. "I haven't seen a march for years."

The beach was a scene of great excitement, dusky natives, with flaming torches, screaming with laughter as they rushed hither and thither after the mali'o. For the mali'o, or land crabs, were marching down in their thousands to the water's edge to take their customary dip in the sea at the change of the moon.

The natives, who regard these votaries of the bath as delicate morsels when baked in banana-leaves with the juice of an old cocoanut, waylaid, chased, and finally captured them with much noisy good humour. From a canoe, which the padre and Warner pushed into the quiet water within the barrier, the sight was both gay and beautiful.

The cocoanut trees silhouetted on the white sands,

the shadows of the hunters as they glanced here and there with their bright torches, their musical mirth, the lovely moonlight on sea and land, severally united to bring gladness to the eye and heart of the wanderer, the man without home or kindred, the man whose whole being, body and soul, was steeped in the love of God.

"We are not free
To say we see not, for the glory comes
Nightly and daily like the flowing sea;
His lustre pierceth through the midnight glooms
And at prime hour behold! He follows me
With golden shadows to my secret rooms,"

repeated Warner, as he stretched himself upon his mat some two hours later, and composed himself to sleep.

But as he slept he dreamed, and the dream was as though he slept not, so vivid, so dominating was the vision.



CHAPTER II.

The sense of beauty is one of the most potent of talismans by which we defeat or keep at a distance the evil genii of what we call Fate.

MATTHEW BROWNE.

Soon after sunrise next morning Warner, with a preoccupied air, strolled down to the shore, and (unlike the mali'o) without fear of molestation, took his dip in the sea. Then, finding he had some spare moments before the breakfast hour, he pushed out a small canoe, and, after paddling for some time, attached the painter to one of the highest coral-branches (some two feet below the surface) that he might ride at anchor. Next, with face downwards, and in horizontal position, he gave himself up to the full enjoyment of the wondrous picture beneath.

The depth varied greatly, as did the width of this belt of water which the reef barred so securely from the fury of the tireless waves beyond. Here, perhaps, not more than two or three fathoms, there ten or twelve, but always the floor was distinctly visible. Many years had passed since Warner had gazed, as now, into the placid waters of the Pacific, and never had he done so under happier conditions.

Not a breath ruffled the surface; the sun shone in all its strength of heat and light, and no disturbing element was present. As the man gazed, his soul was filled anew with wonder and delight. There in the clear water the coral sprouts and sprays spread in grace and beauty, studded with shell-fish of every size, shape, and colour. Warner's object was to watch these myriad shell-fish feed, for when they take in food it as though the coral were encrusted with flashing jewels, so brilliant and beautiful are the tints they display; while fish of all hues glance hither and thither about them, playing hide-and-seek among the coral-branches.

The sight recalled a long-gone past to the gazer-He remembered how in another island, a prey to the dumb despair which seized and held him in thrall for years after he learned the terrible tidings of his young wife's death, he spent whole days gazing face downwards on the coral-forests and their denizens. What he saw then made him a pearl-seeker, and for a long period, during which time he strove to blot from memory all trace of his former existence, with its many sorrows and its few outstanding joys, he dived with, and became as expert as, the natives in the watery element-

The world of ocean then was as entirely new to him as the Californian Alps when he first set foot upon them, and his mind by dc rees became again absorbed by the old questions he and Vallejo had discussed so hotly. From one tropical island to another he roved, his pearl oyster-fishing always bringing him a sufficiency for his simple wants, and in time a small competency. Then he decided to see what other wonders earth had yet to show, and with that resolve came the recollection of the trust Isaac Bennett had made over to him, and which, for aught he knew to the contrary, might, as a consequence of his neglect, have long since passed beyond his control.

Fortunately the padre had preserved the U.S. Treasury receipts, and, after satisfying the officials

as to the cause of his long silence, the interest upon the nuggets was forwarded to Warner, and had been duly forwarded ever since. Hitherto though, all efforts to discover Sarah Bennett or her heirs had proved abortive, and Warner blamed himself greatly for those years in which her claims upon him had remained unheeded. Had he, as he frequently told himself, but "stood and taken his punishment like a man, instead of bending beneath it like a dumb tree in the blast," Isaac Bennett's gold might ong since have been in the possession of its rightful owner.

But now there seemed every probability that the rightful owner had been discovered; yet before this immense sum (for with twenty years' interest it now amounted to something more than £200,000) was paid over, the U.S. Treasury would, without doubt, institute a strict investigation into the whole matter. Warner was therefore anxious to carry Geronimo Encarnacion to New York, to contribute his important quota of evidence as to the deposit and amount of the original specie. And he had not yet named the subject to the old man, but there must be no further delay in mooting and settling the question.

Sounds of activity on shore assured the sea-gazer that the congregation had been dismissed from the white coral church, so, releasing the painter, he made haste to join the padre, who, surrounded by an affectionate crowd, was evidently about to pronounce his blessing upon a small fleet of fishing-canoes lying some hundred yards distant. That service concluded, the two friends climbed the hill, and were glad to find breakfast set outside the little house in the shade cast by a plantation of young cocoanut trees.

The meal ended, the padre, observing Warner's

evident preoccupation, said tenderly, ", Qué tiene Vuestra, hiji mio?"*

"Un sueño me ha despertado, mi padre, a singularly vivid dream, an unpleasant dream, too," was the unexpected reply.

The priest had looked forward to a whole budget of news connected with Jacobo's visit to England, and his doings generally during his long absence—but a dream!

"Yes, my father, it has taken such a hold on me that I shall be wise to tell it, and then, perhaps, it will pass from my mind."

"Do so, my son," said the padre. Dreams held a high position in his regards, and he gave his undivided

attention to the recital of this one.
"It was very strange," continued Wa

"It was very strange," continued Warner, and there was something dreamy in his tones, "that in my dream I went back to the night before I left England, and that, in sleep, I should have felt all the misery and forlornness of my position at that time, as keenly as I felt it in reality. In fancy I was again upon the old Liverpool landing-stage, so different to the splendid docks of to-day. A dense fog hung over the sea, and a strong west wind every now and again dashed rain upon me. I assure you, my father, I felt the drops upon my face as I lay sleeping last night; indeed, I have wondered many times since how reality and fancy could have been so powerfully, so strangely blended."

"Go on, my son," said the padre. To himself he said, "We shall presently see whether this vision is not of God."

"Man-forsaken, God-forsaken, as I had been in

^{*} What troubles you, my son?

reality, so in my dream. I seated myself upon a capstan, undecided what to do or where to go. The fog lifted now and again, thereby disclosing the shifty, leaden Atlantic waves, which seemed, even in my dream, to mock me with their instability; while they, in their turn, were blotted out, and the two prostrate figures in Feringham Wood filled up my whole mental horizon. People were passing, drays were arriving, sailors were busy, yet there I sat, my eyes on the fog, my thoughts in the wood, when (this is dream)," Warner explained, and the padre slowly bent his head—"when a gentle touch on my arm startled me so, that, springing up, I almost knocked down a frail old man at my elbow who, with every mark of deference, apologised for the liberty he had taken.

"'I beg your pardon, sir,' he said, 'but might I make so bold as to ask whether you are sailing in the Arethusa to Vera Cruz?' And I could see with what anxiety he awaited my answer, and hear, too, how greatly his voice trembled. 'Well, I've not quite decided whether to go to Canada, New York, or Mexico,' I answered, jauntily; 'which would you recommend?'

"'God bless you for your kindness, sir; but if it is not a great matter to you where you go, if you will take passage in the *Arethusa* I will never cease as long as I have breath to call down Heaven's blessing upon you.'

"I thought the man daft in my dream, and yet he was terribly in earnest for all his gentle way; and I had not the heart, sad, too, as I was, to laugh, or, indeed, feel anything but sympathy for him. Before I could speak the old man continued: 'It will be twenty

years come Christmas, sir, since I sent my boy Harry away, bidding him never return!"

"Ah!" ejaculated the padre, drawing a long breath, while to himself he said, again, "We shall presently see whether this vision is not of God."

"I started violently," continued Warner, "thinking in my dream it were scarcely possible that two fathers in England and in the same century had turned a son adrift. 'He would be about your age, sir, I should think,' said the old man, 'but a foolish, foolish fellow; continually in disgrace and mixed up in a thousand scrapes. At last I turned him out of house and home, and threatened to make him over to justice if he should ever dare to return. But now I want him; my God, how I want him!' That cry rings in my ears, my father, like the cry of a lost soul."

"Ah!" again ejaculated the padre, "this vision is of God, my son."

But Warner continued his recital as if he had not heard the remark. "'I want you,' the old man said, to find my son, young sir, and beg him to forgive me."

"In my dream I did not feel surprised at the strange request, but listened with deepest interest while he told me what his son was like, and that he had last been heard of in Mexico City. Would I go there and find him and give him his father's message? The next thing I was afloat on the *Arethusa*, and after landing at Vera Cruz I proceeded at once to the City of Mexico. In my dream I felt again the same sensations of pleasure and wonder as when I, in reality, first set foot there. There was so much to claim my attention in the solid, palatial buildings, the breadth and regularity of the numerous squares, the gay

dresses of the Indians, and the beauty of the Spanish women, that I quite forgot the old man's commission. But as I gazed on the novel sights I became aware that the people were most certainly on the watch for something of importance, and then my promise recurred to me. Almost before I remembered that I did not know the young man's surname, I became possessed of it by one of those unaccountable methods known only to dreamers. Mason, Harry Mason, was the man I wanted, but how was I, stranger that I was. to discover him? It was then about ten o'clock in the morning, and as I saw the inhabitants one after another take their stand in the street, at their balconies and above the parapets of the flat-roofed houses, I determined to wait and see what would come—then I would seek for Harry Mason."

Warner paused for a moment, and turning to his interested listener said, "I was standing in the long thoroughfare (you know it well, mi padre) which leads on to the Vera Cruz gate, and suddenly the distant sound of muffled drums fell on my ear from the opposite direction. Some great man was about to be borne to his last resting-place I thought, and strained my eyes to catch the first glimpse of what was evidently an advancing cavalcade. In the far distance loomed that immense building which you, my father, will remember as the palace of the Viceroys, but which when I saw it in reality was prison, palace, and public library. From out this building in my dream issued a military guard of horse and foot to the slow music of the muffled drums. Behind the soldiers walked the officers of justice, followed by some thousands of persons, each carrying an ornamental lantern enclosing a lighted candle. You guess, my father?"

"Go on, my son, go on; tell me all the vision, every detail of it."

"Slowly the mournful procession advanced, and when those who carried the lighted candles had passed by I saw an innumerable company of Franciscans and Dominicans, every third man carrying an enormous crucifix."

The padre nodded, he knew well what was coming.

"At intervals of perhaps two minutes, each crucifix was simultaneously raised on high, while every religious exclaimed in tones deep as the muffled drums, 'Look to the Lord! Look to the Lord!' Immediately behind the priests were two men, to whom the invocation was evidently addressed. You will know, my father, that they were prisoners on their way to execution. Poor creatures! I once saw such a sight in reality, and my pity and horror were as keen in my dream last night as upon that single occasion of which I was a spectator. The unhappy criminals were attired in white woollen gowns and caps, upon which red crosses had been sewn, and so overcome by emotion were they that had they not been supported, they would have fallen from the asses upon which they were seated and to which they were attached by irons. I shuddered at the spectacle they presented, and as women and children fell upon their knees and with dimmed eye and trembling lip besought Heaven's mercy on the doomed, my feelings became almost unbearable. Suddenly I remembered Harry Mason, and eagerly scrutinised the prisoners. Was it possible the fair one could be he? I felt myself choking, yet in my poor Spanish endeavoured to extract some information from my neighbour. Yes, one was an Englishman, a wicked creature, a fiend incarnate,

who had robbed, had murdered, had committed sacrilege, and now was about to receive the due reward of his deeds. His name? I feverishly inquired. That my informant did not know. Mason? Ah, yes, Henriquez Mason, that was the name.

"Then, in mad haste, I turned to follow the procession to give the prisoner his father's message. Thrusting aside every person and thing that impeded my way I rushed, I fought, I struggled, yet I got no nearer to the object of my efforts. As in a nightmare I panted, and was all but suffocated in my attempt to reach that culprit. It was not to be, for when at length I found myself in the open space before the Vera Cruz gate, from one of the two high gallows standing there swung the lifeless form of the Englishman. And I awoke orying, 'Too late; my God, too late!'"

As Warner finished his recital he covered his eyes with his hand, as if to shut out the awful picture.

Upon his over-strained imagination the voice of Padre Geronimo fell calmly. "My son, that was a vision from Heaven! Su padre de Vuestra le llama*; he longs to ask your forgiveness. You must go to him quickly lest it be too late."

Warner rose, and for a moment or more as he paced before the little breakfast-table he remained silent. Then he said, "Naturally you give that interpretation, mi padre, and when I tell you that on his death the estates and title must pass to a distant branch of the family not bearing even the name of Warner, it may well be that the Marquis should, and does, feel some remorse."

"Pass to a distant branch?" echoed the priest.

^{*} Your father is calling you.

"How can that be! Where then are the brothers of

your grace ? "

"The eldest died last August, soon after my flying visit to England, and from the obituary notices (which you may be sure I read with great interest) I learned that my only surviving brother, now Earl Towermains, is in such weak health the doctors do not expect him to outlive the Marquis. Both brothers are childless, indeed, the elder one never married, so it may well be that my father thinks with regret upon having banished me."

" Estoy seguro de eso," said the padre, softly. "But you will go to him, Jacobo, before it is too late?"

"Mi padre, it is already too late," returned Warner, "Parting in anger, as we did, the vows we then made that we would henceforth be as strangers to each other were manifestly registered in heaven and we must each abide the consequences."

"But now, even now, you should speak, my son; for it is surely right in the sight of God and the blessed saints that father and son be reconciled before death parts them indeed for ever. Ah, Jacobo, go not down to the grave without trying at least once more to remove from your soul the stain of that terrible oath. Believe me, this vision is a heaven-sent picture of your father's heart. You must not shut your eyes, nor close your ears, or greater sorrow will befall you in the world beyond this, when the books are opened and every man shall be judged by the deeds recorded there."

"But some deeds can never be undone, mi padre," said the younger man, the throb in his voice proclaiming how greatly he was moved. "Nothing has been

^{*} I am sure of it.

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the same since I made that oath, and if I had not believed that the only thing left for me was to stand and take my deserved punishment without a murmur, I might long ago have taken my life, so valueless did it at one time appear."

"But now, my son," urged the other, "now you will go to the *Marchese*; now, even at this eleventh hour, you will see him and tell how God and the blessed saints

have preserved you to each other."

Slowly "Lord Jim" shook his head. "It is impossible for me to open my lips now," he said, "impossible! I am not the boy I was when the Marquis and I parted. None would recognise me for the same. Then I have no proofs of identity to offer. My marriage certificate, the miniatures of the Marquis and Marchioness, where are they? Either lost or wilfully suppressed. Besides, the monument in St. Mary's commemorates my death thirty years ago, and the newspapers last year referred to it in their obituary notices of my brother William. No, mi padre, as I said before, our oath was registered above and neither I nor the Marquis can abjure it."

"But God and the blessed saints might wipe it out," persisted the priest. And to himself he murmured, "After ye have suffered awhile, stablish, strengthen,

settle you."

As though he heard not, Warner continued, "It would be madness to speak now, with no credentials, no proof of identity save only your word, mi padre. And what end would be gained by bringing an action in a court of law (for, believe me, the heir would rightly contest such a flimsy claim), since, on my death, the Marquisate must pass to this distant branch of the family? No, no, let us not speak again on this question.

Later I shall tell you of other circumstances connected with my visit to England. But now," he continued, "I must leave my own concerns for other and more pressing business. Can you, dear padre, without great inconvenience, go to New York with me very soon?"

The priest looked aghast at question and questioner. His fixed purpose for years had been to live and die on this island (unless Jacobo needed him elsewhere); the island he fondly believed to be the identical San Juan Bautista discovered by his fellow-countryman, the great Quiros, in 1606, for was it not, although hilly, "plain and even a-top" as described by that celebrated voyager? And why should he go to New York?

"It is about this gold of Isaac Bennett's," explained "As a result of all the inquiries set afoot we are at last on the track of the Randalls. One of the letters I found on my arrival yesterday was from the principal agent I have employed in this business. He informs me that he hopes to have the heir in New York early in June and begs me to meet him there and bring you, too. I had the good fortune when in England last year to come across the Blue-book of the New Zealand Land Company, and discovered Fred Randall's name there as one of the claimants for redress from Government. As the address of each claimant was necessarily given, it greatly simplified matters, as we knew exactly where he was in 1852 (the date of the claim), and also that he had at that time a child, for whom he also claimed, whose mother, we have since ascertained, was Isaac Bennett's sister. I cannot tell you how thankful I shall be to be relieved of this trust. It seems we lost a great deal of time in prosecuting the search for so long in New Zealand, for the Blue-

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book states that Fred Randall left the colony in '46 or '47 and that he did not marry till '49 or '50. You will go, my father?'

"You think it is really necessary that I go?"

"I do indeed, and the change will do you good. It will seem like a new world to you; we shall look in vain for our old lodgings by the Battery, now."

"But I do not think there will be a steamer going for some time," said the priest, tentatively; "and I must send to the Marais Fathers at Upolu if I am to leave my people for awhile."

"Suppose I go along to the harbour now, and find out what vessels are expected," suggested Warner. "I have some baggage there, and a sail will be just the thing for me."

"Bueno mi hijo," returned the padre, "there is now a fine breeze. As you come back, go ashore by Taku wood and you will find me near the river. I go there to catch my favourite fish for you, and in your honour I take a holiday."

"Mil gracias, mi padre!"

And the two parted, secretly rejoiced that the tension of the past hour would be broken by a temporary separation.



CHAPTER III.

O Captain, my Captain! Our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won.
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies
Fallen, cold and dead.

WALT WHITMAN.

IF Warner set out for a ten miles' sail to the harbour in the hope of obliterating the impression of the dream, Geronimo Encarnacion betook himself to Taku wood with the express object of discovering his special duty in regard to it.

Jacobo had dismissed it and the interpretation thereof as beyond the bounds of consideration. But one must not stop the ears when God speaks. And one must have time to look into such matters, and silence and solitude.

So the good priest called for Juan de Dios and his fishing tackle, and having given his servant with the remarkable cognomen (John the Baptist) orders to bring lunch in three hours' time to the river-side, set out for the wood. With every appearance of haste, lest he should be delayed, he crossed the small table-land upon which stood the cottages of the natives and the coral church, and was soon beneath the shade of a fine avenue of immense vatu trees, their long tassels

of pink and white flowers filling the air with delicate perfume.

Here, little brown, bare-breasted children ran from their play that the good padre might sign them with the sign of the Cross. But he did not linger with them as was his custom, neither did he pause to chat with the scattered workers in the garden-plots of the natives—gardens he had himself assisted to lay out, and which now looked gay with glossy-leaved coffee plants, pinkflowered tobacco clumps, and yellow-blossoming cotton bushes. The padre's thoughts this morning were otherwhere, the cry of the dream-father ringing in his ears, "I want him!"

Presently he had left the level land and was descending a hill clothed with trees about whose bark and branches the trailing convolvulus had wreathed itself in dense coils, and at whose feet orchids sprang in luxuriant loveliness. Then came ravines, their sides all but hidden by lofty tree-ferns, the floor of the wood carpeted with wild cinnamon and nutmeg, and here and there more stately flowering plants. Away below ran the river, sparkling wherever the sun's rays pierced the green tracery. There the wood was more open and a breeze from the sea perceptible. There, also, above and beyond every other boon, was solitade.

Without glancing at the bait Juan de Dios had provided, the padre cast his line and, oblivious of the necessity for silence if he would catch fish, commenced to think aloud while he paced up and down the bank. As at San Carlos, so here, whenever he desired to thrash out any question he betook himself to solitude, and ranging the pros. and cons. in opposition, after the method of St. Ignatius, would deliver himself of them in his sermon voice.

But now he forsook the office of preacher, or rather regarded himself as both hearer and preacher combined, one who must equally endeavour to convince and be convinced. When Jacobo was with him the padre, invariably spoke English, as otherwise he had little opportunity of preserving his knowledge of that language. And this morning, as the matter he was about to discuss had reference solely to Jacobo, he unconsciously stated his arguments in English, broken at times, and occasionally sprinkled with Spanish.

A remarkable figure he presented as he strode forwards and backwards, fighting mentally for and against himself—a spare, tonsured figure, clad in gown of spotless white *sulu*, from his neck depending a wooden cross, from his waist a rosary.

"It is not," he commenced, "that Jacobo is angry with his father. Oh, no; in his heart there is no longer any anger towards anyone. No, it is not that; Jacobo has always the good heart. But what says he? He says, and has always said, 'I have done all in my power to unsay my wicked oath, but see, the oath still stands, it will not, cannot, be wiped away, so I will try no more, it is the law that I suffer. I make the oath, I must then keep it. I must not again try to undo it or more sorrow will come.'

"Bueno, I say. But now let me go over all that he has done to put aside this great oath. First, he would write to his father more than twenty years ago when he came to me at San Carlos. He is determined so to do; then he discovers that he is already dead in his father's sight, and that they have even put up the monument in their church in Inglaterra. So he does not write. He thinks his father wished him to be dead. Then he no more cares to live until the sweet

señora comes, and again all is bright once more. They will go to the English lord and the bad vow shall be now washed out. But no. • Yo creo en Dios, but oh, what mystery, what pain, what grief!"

And the speaker's voice throbbed with the emotion evoked by memory.

"Now come I to the most grief-ful part—the time when Jacobo gives up and will try no more to do away with the oath. Poor fellow! † Lo compadezco de todo corazon! Yes, it was in April, a day like this, that I see Jacobo-Jacobo, who, fifteen months before I left so bright. I am then at Upolu where the Bishop had placed me. That month he tells me to look for La Colombe—the ship of the Société pour le progrès de l'océan—for it will bring me books and a Madonna and St. Joseph for the little church. So I am there on the shore just after matins, and I find La Colombe at anchor, and the mission priests who came in her on They have only two hours, for the vessel goes to take them to other islands, so I talk with them and receive the books and the box with the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph."

Here the padre paused to cross himself, and perhaps to gain breath to describe what he had always regarded as the supreme moment in his life at Upolu.

"They will see my church, so I walk with them, and we return to the shore, for La Colombe is raising her anchor. The priests go on board, I bid them farewell, I turn among my people who watch the ship, and I see there a strange man, and as I look he turns also from watching the ship, and when his look falls upon me he smiles, and I wonder and wonder till he is by

^{*} I believe in God.

[†]I pity him with all my heart.

my side and saying ‡ 'Padre mio soy su hijo, su hijo Jacobo!' Jacobo? Yes, yes; I was glad, though all at once the sun seemed black, and beneath my robe I made secretly the sign of the cross. Jacobo here? He had quickly come to my station. And the beautiful señora, where was she? And why is Jacobo so thin, and his clothes—why so old?

But he will tell me everything, everything, from the time I bid them adios before they marry. And he tells me how he is left on that terrible island Tristan D'Acunha found, far, far away from everyone, on his way to New Zealand, and how his heart was eaten out with sorrow. How he waits day after day, week after week, and month after month, yet no ship comes to take him away to England and the señora. At last he can wait no longer, but will go out, without telling anyone, in the frail boat on the open sea, and by good fortune, or I should say gracias á Dios, was picked up by whalers. He was almost drowned and his boat quite lost, yet he was surely away from the terrible island.

"As he tells me these things I ask myself 'Why, why, and again why, should such troubles come?' But to him I said only, § '¿ Y pues mi hijo?'"

"The whalers were very kind, and though they were going round the Horn—not the right way for Jacobo—they promise to put him on the first ship they sight. But it is close to Juan Fernandez they are before they fall in with one, and that was La Colombe with the mission priests on board. The Capitan tells him he will surely find a vessel for England at Upolu, and Jacobo had gone already to the British Consul to find

^{*}It is I, your son—Jacobo, my father. † And then, my son.



if this were so before I came down to the shore. And Jacobo was glad—to-morrow at noon a ship would call and sail for England. Once more he would be with the señora and all again be well!"

The padre paused for a moment to moisten his lips.

"Ah, the poor señora! Jacobo said, * Ella tiene un motivo de tristeza,' but † El fin corona la obra.'

"To myself I said, ‡'Bien Vengas mal si vienes solo,' but I, too, hoped for the best.

"And now comes the great, the crowning obstacle. It tears my heart, so I hasten. Jacobo must have other clothing, so later we go to the store of the Yankee. While Jacobo speaks to him I take in my hands The Polynesian from where it lies upon a bale of cotton-prints. And I see there something that makes me cry out before I know what I do.

"Jacobo turns to me and say, § '¿ Qui tiene Vuestra?" I speak not, then he snatch the paper at which I am staring and reads that his wife is dead.

"Tocante á eso, no se qué decir. Dead! Ah, God! Dead in all her beauty and youth and happiness—dead for nearly seven months! My heart breaks for him. There can be no mistake; her name, her age, her town that she was born in, all so true. For the marriage name she had not yet taken. She wish not that the poor Irish know she is married.

"What mystery, what pain, what grief! Jacobo he pushes the paper in his pocket and walks out away—away from the ship—away to the hills. I follow; I say, 'Tenga, paciencía, caro hiji mio; tranquilicese Usted; there will, perhaps, be some mistake.'

^{*} She has cause for sorrow.

† All's well that ends well.

† What is the matter with you?

|| I scarcely know how to speak of it.

"But he speaks not, and he walks fast, so fast that I can scarce keep with him. On and on we go far up the mountain, and the sun sets and the stars come out, and still he will not stop. Then all at once he staggers, he falls upon the ground, he can no further go.

"That night I go not to Vespers, ah, no; I could not. I would not leave the poor stricken fellow. But he knew not that I carried him those miles back to the mission. At last he is safe upon my mat and I give him water, but he say only, *' Yo me ahogo! Yo me ahogo!

"Ah, those were sad days when no one must speak of these troubles. I must put away, too, the paper about the gold I find in his pocket, for the sight of it would bring back all his sorrow. He goes for weeks and months blind and deaf to all that went before he touched Upolu, and when one day I say, quietly, 'Will you not go now to *Inglaterra* and see your father and the brother of La Condesa?' he say, sharply, 'No, no. Do not speak of it; I ought never to have tried to undo that solemn vow, for that I am now punished.' Then, more sadly, he say, 'They want me not, to them I am dead; dead I will be.'

"I urge him, I say, '¿ Quién sabe? there may be a little son?'

"But he turn roughly upon me, 'If we can be told of a death out here we can be told of a birth,' and he will listen no more to any entreaties. And that, for Jacobo, is the end.

"But for me? No. So again I say, 'I myself will send a letter to the *Marchese!*' And Jacobo reply that if I do he will go away, away where none can find him. He say if his father want him why does he not

^{*} I am drowning!

put again some notice in *The Polynesian*, why not send some people to look for and find him? The marriage paper and the portraits the señora had with her, these the *Marchese* must have, or if they are lost then there is the letter with the heart-break which Jacobo wrote at the island D'Acunha found. Why, then, is not that letter answered? And if everything be lost, then of what use to fight against God? So Jacobo reply to my urgings.

"And to-day comes this vision of the father longing to ask his son whom he has banished to forgive him. Is it not that now I must at last speak, that I delay no longer? Yet, who knows if sorrow will not follow should I write to the *Marchese* of *Inglaterra?* If the vision be indeed not from above and I bring only more sorrow upon Jacobo whom I love so well? Ah, that an angel would come and tell me 'Speak,' or 'Do not speak,' for I know not what I must do!"

The distress of the padre was so real he had lost all cognisance of his surroundings. To all intents and purposes he was waiting at heaven's gate. He paused, his head thrown back, his gaze fixed on the blue vault above. Would not some white-winged messenger cleave the air and by some definite pronouncement make duty unmistakably clear? He waited, still expectant, only to start in genuine alarm when a quiet voice behind him said, "Se ha servido, mi padre!"

Lunch ready? How could that be? As yet the fish were not caught, much less were they cooked. But Juan de Dios had not lived with Padre Geronimo for twelve years without knowing well, besides a few Spanish phrases, what usually happened when his master "preached in Taku Wood."

Privately he regarded these sermons as highly con-

ducive to the catching of fish, for he found little difficulty in taking a goodly number about a hundred yards further down the river. The smoke from his earth oven was plainly visible when the padre turned at his servant's voice, and there, in a pleasant perspective was Jacobo, who had followed the stream up from the sea. On the quay he had opened some luggage which it had been impossible to bring from the harbour yesterday, and when luncheon was over, to the great delight of the priest, he produced a number of beautiful photographs.

There were views from and of almost every part of the world-mountain scenery, arctic scenery, scenery of lake and plain; and there was much to tell and to hear, for Warner had visited in person at some time or other all the places represented.

Presently he took from his breast-pocket a smaller set of views, and passing one over to his friend said, quietly, "That is the churchyard where Eleanor lies, and that is her grave."

"You saw it, then, my son?" and the padre's voice was very tender. "I am glad that you went to your town."

"No, no, I did not go to Hurstwick; I could not have borne to tread those familiar streets. No, this is Friston-Boughton churchyard, the lovely little village where she met death. I should like to tell you what I discovered there, and afterwards, my dear padre, we will not speak of these things."

Then the younger man told how, after an expedition to Iceland, he last year summoned up courage to go to England for the first time since he left it a boy of nineteen. Sure that he would not be recognised. he had ventured to Friston-Boughton, and had been greatly surprised to find that his wife was buried there and not at Hurstwick, as he had always supposed. That he learned that her death was the result of an accident as she was posting to Hurstwick on her return from America, and (most singular and distressing fact) that the stone above her grave bore the inscription: "Sacred to the memory of Eleanor Gavin Jones, née Ronaldson, formerly of Hurstwick, who died November 10th, 1848, aged 27 years."

At this quotation the padre could no longer refrain from interrupting the recital. "Oh, mi hijo," he exclaimed, "my dear Jacobo, it will be as I have always thought. There was a child. See, there is the child, but no father for it, so they have put this name that La Condesa and her son shall not be evil spoken of. Ah, blessed mother of God! If only you had gone there long ago! But even now—did you not ask for the child?" he broke off to inquire, and awaited the answer with intense eagerness.

"Dear padre," returned Warner, sad conviction in his tones, "she left no child. These people with whom I stayed were quite certain on that point; they would have heard of it if she had, they were sure. And when I tell you I stayed with the parish clerk and his wife, you may know I could not have gone to a better source of information. This man (Davidson he is called) remembered perfectly the burial of Eleanor. He told me who was at the funeral even. No," continued Warner, in answer to an observation made by his companion, "no, the husband was not there. Davidson understood that Mr. Jones was in America. Someone who came over from Hurstwick to the funeral told him so. No, it was not Tom Ronaldson, probably his bank manager; Davidson had forgotten the man's name. Jones was the name given at the funeral, and as I told you just now Jones is the name upon the gravestone, though that had only been put up a few months before I was there."

"But then," commenced the priest, greatly puzzled, "why marry her as they have, unless there were a child! She could not have——"

"Nay, nay, do not hint at such a thing," interrupted the other, as he strode up and down, his anger at the unspoken suggestion barely kept within bounds. "Let us not quarrel. No, she would never have married another had I never returned and she had lived to be a hundred."

"Nay, Jacobo," returned the priest, tender reproach in his voice, "such a thought came not to my mind. But she may have given that name as hers, waiting till you could come and she should use her own, which is yours. See again, and that will prove that I am right. She gives this name because soon she will be a mother, or, if not, why should she not keep her own which she bears till her marriage? The brother, you say, was not at the burial; that is surely because he is not returned from New Zealand. She dies and none is there to whom she may tell of you. If she has already, before she is ill, called herself by this name Jones, she cannot afterwards change it. But she would not (I say it with all my heart) have taken this name had there not been a child."

Warner had listened patiently to this long explanation, then he said: "What you say, my padre, may be true in some respects, yet the fact remains, there is and was no child."

"I think those people must be wrong who told you there is no child. Was it before their own door that this accident comes that they know so surely there was

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no child, or was it not far from their cottage in a faraway hacienda? And the padre of the English church and the people at whose house La Condesa died, have you not seen and spoken with them all?"

"No, I saw none of them. The clergyman, who has only been there about two years, was not in the village then, so I could not see the books, and what excuse could I have made to the people who were with Eleanor at the last? If they knew her as Mrs. Jones what good could I do by going and upsetting their ideas? No, I was better away from them, more particularly as I should have probably stumbled upon my brother-in-law there."

"The Señor Ronaldson?" exclaimed the priest, in great astonishment. "Why should he go there now, since that his sister has been dead so many years?"

"It seems these people (they are maiden ladies) have brought up a child of his almost from babyhood," explained Warner. "The boy—for it is a boy—was sent to Switzerland, I gathered, when he was about twelve, and there was some talk of his going back to Friston last summer to meet his father there."

"That is a strange story, my Jacobo," said the padre, his eyes fixed on his companion's face. "Why is the boy brought up away from his father and mother? Why is he not living at Hurstwick? Why is he kept away while he is a baby, boy and young man? Nay, answer me not, Jacobo; I see you cannot tell. But now I will tell you. That child will be your own son," he continued, with convincing impressiveness, "and because you, his father, have not come forward to own him he must be kept away from the friends of his true parents lest evil shall be spoken of him and his mother. Ah, Jacobo," and the old man rose, and

tenderly laid his hand upon the other's shoulder, "be not like your father, the *Marchese*, but go quickly and claim your son. Let him not suffer for your silence. Delay no longer."

It was impossible to remain unmoved during this invocation, and it was some little time before Warner had his voice sufficiently under control to reply. Then, linking the priest's arm in his, and raising his head as if to take in fresh strength from the beauty of the azure sky as it canopied the wood and stream, he said:

"Dear padre, you are mistaken. I have no son. This boy bears the name of Jack Ronaldson. There is no manner of doubt about it. Davidson, the clerk, was present at the child's christening and has seen the entry in the church book fifty times or more; so that he knew it by heart and repeated it for my benefit. I had to explain that I was very distantly related to some Ronaldsons, and had been struck by the name on a gravestone in the churchyard."

"But the boy—what was in the church book about him?" inquired the padre, with almost feverish anxiety.

"This: 'John, son of Thomas and Eleanor Ronaldson, of Hurstwick.'"

"Eleanor?" echoed the priest, as a drowning man clutches at a straw.

"Yes, Eleanor, but Eleanor is not an uncommon name, though Eleanor Gavin is. You see, dear padre, if this boy were my Eleanor's son, he would naturally be known by the same name, Jones—you see that?"

"No, no, my son; I cannot see anything but this: that the boy you have heard of is your own child. Do not ask me to believe he is not, for the angel I but

now prayed for has come into my heart and has told me this. And last night the vision has come to you of the breaking heart of your father. Ah, dear Jacobo"—and the Spaniard's tones fell as balm upon the wounded heart Warner had carried for years so bravely, so securely hidden—"you have told me so often, you know, that at the centre of every flint is a sponge. Now it is that the *Marchese* has no longer the hard heart, but is crying out for you that he may see you before he goes hence and is no more. Your father and your son both call you. You must heed."

As the old man explained and entreated, Warner listened and mused. What if, after all, things were as the padre had pictured? What if he had been wrong in accepting Eleanor's death as an intimation that, like Cain's offering, his effort to abjure his vow was and ever would be rejected? Or that later theory of his that all he had suffered was but the natural, automatic consequence of his own and his father's wrongdoing, and that any further endeavour to undo the wrong was foredoomed to failure. Ought he to have tried again? But no, there could be no child or he would have heard of it long since.

Yet, that Eleanor should bear the name of Jones distressed him beyond measure. It was a personal injury to her, so it seemed to him, to let it rest above her grave. But what could he do? Having kept silence for so long how was it possible that if he spoke now his story would be believed and Eleanor righted? He had suffered many things because of his oath, but that Eleanor should, to all posterity, go down as the wife of some unknown Jones was to crown sorrow with sorrow. He must brace himself, however, to bear what he was powerless to alter.

"No hay plazo que no se cumpla, ni denda que no se paque,"* broke in Geronimo, his face aglow with the fire of hope.

"Let us leave the matter now, dear padre," said Warner, rousing himself. "You, who believe that all our life from start to finish lies in the hand of God, that a pressure from His finger here or there shapes it in this form or the other; and I, who believe that we ourselves, or those connected with us, shape life by acts we elect to do or leave undone, shall we not each await with patience whatever Time may bring? We need not fear, I dare not hope, I must not, cannot, act."

An orange-breasted dove coold in an adjacent tree, the harsh clang of the Vesper bell, softened by distance rang through the wood. Yes, the friends could afford to wait.

^{*}All is not lost that is delayed.

CHAPTER IV.

"He needs no other rosary whose thread of life is strung with beads of love and thought." THE ZEND AVESTA.

WHEN Jack left Heather's Edge he had fully determined to go direct to Geneva. But on the passage from Dover to Calais he drifted into converse with a gentleman who, accompanied by two sons, aged respectively fourteen and sixteen, was making a tour of the Continent before returning to New York.

Just as the boat entered Calais Harbour the American said, bluntly, "Say, can you make it convenient to go around with me and the boys? If so, I'll make it worth your while; you know the lingo, and you evidently know the places I want to see. My name is Chalfont Merridew, acting lawyer to the United States Treasury. I'm good for two hundred guineas and all 'exes.' till June next. If those terms suit give me your name and your hand. I want nothing more, for, if I don't know who I've got to deal with after half-an-hour's talk, my name is not Chalfont Merridew and I'd better let the President have my checks at once."

Now Jack had given much thought on the railway journey as to what name he should adopt. To make use either of Jones or Ronaldson would be to insult his mother's memory, and he at last decided to take the first surname his eye fell upon on reaching the next

station, so was able to reply without hesitation, as he offered Mr. Merridew his hand, "Warner, Mr. John Warner, sir."

To his intense gratification he found himself, without further parley, attached to the travelling *ménage* of this American with the prospect of seeing New York in less than twelve months' time.

Jack's linguistic powers deprived the tour of that host of disagreeables which invariably dogs the steps of the tourist who knows no language save his own. Mr. Merridew, thus at liberty to enjoy himself thoroughly, was consequently annoyed on reaching Constantinople to find letters rendering his immediate return to New York imperative. Murmurs arose, too, from the young Merridews. Why might they not continue their travels with Mr. Warner? Mr. Warner was, of course, very young, but three months' close companionship with him had convinced the lawyer that his sons could not be better off in older hands. So the desired permission was given, and the young people set out by themselves to visit the Holy Land. and later, Algiers, Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Berlin, One sole stipulation did Mr. Merridew make, and that was that the trio should reach New York not later than the coming June.

So it happened that a week before the Marquis of Pierhampton received the remarkable and gratifying news that he was a grandfather, his grandson, with the young Merridews, embarked at Hamburg for the States. Jack had immensely enjoyed the months spent in travel, and their influence upon him physically and mentally was very marked.

Now he was about to set foot in America, and as soon as he had delivered himself of his charges it was

his intention to commence and follow up the search for his father. There must be people, even at this distance of time, who remembered his mother; it was absurd he told himself, that all trace of her should have been lost. The banker had failed because he had been afraid to push inquiries. Jack had no fears; moreover, it was imperative he should have a name to offer Jo. before he made formal application for her hand to the carver next November. Mr. Merridew had been extremely liberal, so the search would not prove abortive for lack of funds.

That gentleman, however, seemed in no hurry to lose sight of Jack, and the sons were full of plans to make him acquainted with "the land o' freedom." At dinner on the night of their arrival, a campaign on New York City, to be made on the morrow, was eagerly discussed.

But with the entrance of dessert and the retirement of the servants, the lawyer brought forward another proposition.

"I had almost forgotten," he exclaimed, "but whatever you do or leave undone to-morrow, remember you are all expected to be at the Hotel London at four o'clock."

"Some horrid call, I suppose," said Granger, the younger of the brothers. "I hate making calls, and a call at that hour will break into the day and upset it altogether."

"You've plenty of days before you," returned his father; "Mr. Warner is not going to leave us yet awhile."

"And you'll never forgive yourself if you don't go," remarked Miss Merridew, the lawyer's maiden sister, who had occupied the place left vacant at her brother's table ever since his wife's death twelve years before. "But tell them, Chalfont, about the people they are to see; when they've heard the story they'll want to go fast enough. It's more like a fairy-tale than anything I've heard since I was in my teens."

"Pray let us hear this modern fairy-tale, sir," said Horatio, the elder brother; "I'm rather too welltravelled," he continued, with mock pretentiousness, "to go into heroics over a trifle."

"Well, here it is, and I'll wager you will have nothing so pretty or so singular among all your newlyacquired old stories. I shall condense as much as possible. Once upon a time——"

"Oh, come now," interrupted Granger.

"Well, we'll consider the preface as said, and without further circumlocution or use of legal phraseology be it known unto you all and severally that in the year 1844—three years before the outbreak of the Californian gold fever—one Isaac Bennett, sometime first mate on the Boston sloop, the Falcon, 'struck ile.' In other words, he wandered into the San Joaquin Valley, from thence to the Nevada Foot Hills, and there found gold. And continued to find it, and in course of time (two years) filled a cave with the findings thereof."

"Draw it mild, father," interposed Granger.

"That is exactly what I am doing, my child. Behold, then, a cave, three feet long and seven feet high, nearly full of fine gold upon which three or four valuable nuggets rest. Remember, too, that this cave is or was, situated on the Foothills of the Nevadas, which at that period scarce knew the foot of any human being save the gentle savage Indian."

"And the cave has only just been discovered with

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the goldfinder's last will and testament cut in cruciform characters on the rock," ventured Horatio.

"Nothing of the sort, my dear fellow, as you shall hear. In October, 1846, the gold amasser comes to grief, meets with an accident which proves fatal. The air is already darkened by the vultures who impatiently await his last-drawn breath, when a stranger appears upon the scene, disperses the vultures and gives the man aqua ardente."

"Wounded man makes him his heir. Lucky

beggar!"

"Not so fast, Granger. The nuggets are pressed upon the new arrival, who turns out to be no stranger, but a passenger on board the vessel in which the said Isaac had been an officer before he went into the Boston trade. Isaac, revived by the spirit, recognises his succourer who, by the bye, bears the same name as yourself, Mr. Warner."

And the lawyer turned and bowed to Jack.

"Perhaps he'll prove a cousin three times removed, and you'll come in for the yellow boys, Mr. Jack. That would be a capital *finale* to this lengthy modern fairy-tale. Can't you hurry up a bit, father?"

"Well, the gold dust is to be despatched to the finder's sister, and Mr. Warner, the new arrival, promises the dying man that she shall have it, though at the time he gave the promise he had no idea that he was undertaking such a big job. I'll leave you to imagine for yourselves the difficulties attending the transport of this gold across the San Joaquin Valley, just when our people were making a raid on the country. However, this Mr. Warner in due course reaches the Mission of San Carlos outside Monte Rey. There he falls ill. The Mission has been sold by auction, the

purchaser comes to take possession. These events happened nearly twenty-three years ago, and ten days back the money reached for the first time the hands of the rightful owner."

- "But how did they get the gold away from the Mission?"
- "Ah, I thought, Granger, you would take the thing seriously at last."

And Jack was evidently as greatly interested as the brothers.

- "The deus ex machina in the case was one of the Mission Fathers, who succeeded in getting the invalid and all the gold on board a vessel bound for this port. In due time the specie was transported to Washington, and has lain in the States' Treasury awaiting its rightful owner ever since. Of course, we have made use of the money, and have paid for the use of it. We wanted cash very badly in those days, and if this unexpected windfall did not actually avert national bankruptcy I may safely say (at this distance of time) that it largely influenced our determination to purchase California."
- "Well, I never! The fairy-tale is actually budding into an historical event," remarked Horatio, while Jack followed with the question,
 - "Why wasn't the gold claimed before, sir?"
- "The Sarah Bennett could not be found, perhaps because the Mr. Warner, who in the spring of 1848 himself set out for New Zealand (where she was then said to be), was unfortunately stranded on the island of Tristan d'Acunha en route, and it was months before he had an opportunity of getting away. Then he was taken just in the contrary direction, to the Samoan islands, and there fell ill. I believe his illness was

caused by some domestic bereavement, but of this I am not certain. I know, though, that nothing was done in respect of the claim for seven or eight years, when this Mr. Warner wrote giving us this explanation of his long silence. Since then he has been indefatigable in his efforts to fulfil his trust to the dying Bennett, and his efforts are at length crowned with success. After a most careful examination of all the facts we are convinced the rightful owners have been discovered, and you are all to go and have a look at the fortunate ones to-morrow between four and six o'clock."

"It's not half a bad story, Aunt Sarah," remarked Granger, with amusing patronage, "but tell us, father, how much money there is."

"Well, I'll tell you what it amounts to in English pounds, and you can work it out in dollars at your leisure. It's a nice little sum, and we've nursed it well; just now it amounts to something like a quarter of a million pounds English."

"My word! That's something worth having!" observed Horatio; "but then as like as not it will soon be scattered. People who are not used to money, and have a fortune all at once showered upon them rarely use it wisely," he continued, with the air of *l'homme sage*.

"What sort of a chap is the heir?" was Granger's next question.

"You must go and see for yourself," replied Merridew, senior, and his eye twinkled if it did not in reality wink across to his sister. "Now don't put on any patronising airs, Horatio," he continued; "I shouldn't be surprised if you find quite a family party to receive you; very likely the old Mission Father as well as Mr. Warner. They have begged that the affair may

be kept as much as possible out of the newspapers, indeed, they appear most anxious to avoid anything like publicity."

"They want to avoid being squeezed, I expect,"

interpolated Merridew major.

"I don't know about that, but I know they have declined several introductions I offered them. However, as I have had the sole conduct of the case for the Treasury and they are pleased to express themselves as thoroughly satisfied wth my methods, they could scarcely refuse me when I proposed that the members of my family should pay a complimentary visit before they leave for England."

"It's a pity they are so anxious to return," remarked Aunt Sarah, "it would only be fair to spend their money where they found it."

Jack had listened with mingled feelings to this curious history. At first, with the indifferent interest one gives to purely impersonal matters, then, when a Mr. Warner proved to be an important factor in the story, an apprehension seized him lest unpleasant consequences should follow were the false and the true Warner to meet. He would formulate an excuse for not accompanying the Merridews on their visit to these nouveaux riches.

Hitherto, Jack's self-appropriated surname had caused him not the slightest inconvenience, no one had ever questioned his right to it, or had even ventured to ask whether he was a member of the Warner family of Blank, in Blankshire. Granger Merridew's curiosity, it is true, had led him in the early days of their acquaintanceship to suggest that it would be wiser to have one's own name painted on one's travelling bag rather than some one else's. For Jack, determined

to carry away everything that had belonged to his mother, was using his mother's bag which, until he laid hands upon it, had never been touched since Ronaldson ransacked it twenty years before. As he now silently resolved to avoid any contact with this other 'Warner, he was struck by something that seemed familiar in the narration of the "modern fairy tale" by the lawyer. It would indeed be a remarkable coincidence if two people, in the very same year, should leave America for New Zealand and each be prevented reaching that colony. Could it be possible that here was a clue which, if followed up, might bring him the information he so earnestly desired? Then and there Jack silently determined that nothing should prevent his making one of the party of callers on the morrow, and more important still, that he would confide everything to Mr. Merridew without delay. Naturally he would be his best adviser, for not only had he proved himself a friend, not only was his legal ability of the highest, but he had knowledge, personal knowledge of the United States and New York City. So that summer night in Central Park, he introduced the subject as they two stood together in the Belvedere.

"My mother was married in New York City or State," he commenced, "and I am anxious to discover the church where the ceremony took place." Then, feeling that it would be wiser to tell the whole story as Miss Barnard had detailed it, he did so.

His listener was deeply interested, it was a case after his own heart. Cautious, though, as lawyers should be, he committed himself to no opinion, though he bid Jack be of good cheer. "I'll sleep on your story, and we will formulate some plan towards the solution of the mystery tomorrow. At present I do not think I would advertise for particulars of the marriage. Our population has been almost nomadic during the past twenty years, and the event will not be fresh in any one's memory. I grant you it would very probably have brought an answer had your uncle advertised when he came over after your mother's death. But, you must remember, in 'the forties' newspapers were not sown broadcast over the land as they are at the present day. Where did you say you were born?"

"In Derbyshire, England."

"Yes; but where?"

"At the village of Friston-Boughton, or rather at a small farm-house about four miles from the village."

"Ah! indeed! And—But we'll talk again tomorrow, for here come the boys."

Although Jack made no reference to the fact that the Mr. Warner of "the modern fairy tale" had been prevented reaching New Zealand the very year that his mother had spoken of her husband as having been delayed on his way thither, the coincidence had not failed to strike Mr. Merridew. "I must draw the old Mission-Father," was his unspoken comment.

An invitation for Miss and the young Merridews to take lunch with relatives next day enabled the lawyer to carry out a project he had formed in the small hours of the morning.

"Certainly you must go to your Uncle Ben," he said, when the boys made objection. "I'll take charge of Mr. Warner. He can drive to the office with me and we'll meet you all at the Hotel London

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at four o'clock, when I shall introduce you to my clients."

"You didn't tell us how these nouveaux riches are called," remarked Granger.

"Your father told you, my dear," said Aunt Sarah, for the lawyer was occupied with his letters, "that the Sarah Bennett married a Mr. Randall."

"Oh, Randall, quite an ordinary English name; but that won't be good enough for them now. You'll see they'll be coming out as Vere de Veres before long."

Aunt Sarah smiled, she liked to see young people happy.

"Randall père now, will be some fat, pompous creature with fat capon-lined."

"Don't be an ass, Granger," interrupted the elder brother, severely.

"And Randall mère," continued the younger, nothing daunted, "will have red cheeks, red nose, red elbows (she'll be sure to have her elbows on show), and hair to match."

"Shut up, silly; it's a pity there are no sophronista stones to throw at your head, you'll never learn discretion," remarked Horatio.

Then, turning and addressing himself exclusively to his aunt and Jack, he said, in his most sententious manner:

"It's always a mistake (in this case, of course, a misfortune) when the wife has the money; it humiliates the husband and brutalises the wife."

This observation produced a general outburst of hilarity—Horatio's wise sayings contrasted so strangely with his hobble-de-hoyhood.

"What's this? A Daniel come to judgment?" exclaimed the lawyer, rising, as a servant entered to

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say the trap was in readiness. "We must be off now, Mr. Warner."

And, as the boys accompanied their seniors into the hall, Horatio whispered to Jack, "Don't forget to make up to your namesake this afternoon; he had the nuggets, you know!"

CHAPTER V.

"I'm sorry that I spelt the word,
I hate to go above you,
Because," the brown eyes lower fell,
"Because, you see, I love you!"

"I SHALL drive Mr. Warner towards West Point, Vedder, so take the cars and meet us at Vesey Street not later than half-past eleven."

The groom touched his hat and turned in the direction of the stables, while the lawyer and Jack set out unattended.

"Now we can speak freely," remarked Mr. Merridew, as they bowled along Fifth Avenue. "I want a few more particulars before deciding what course of action to pursue. Your case interests me greatly, and, as the Randalls have been discovered after a lapse of twenty-two years, I see no reason why your missing parent should not be unearthed. But I must honestly tell you that, so far as I am able to judge you have acted foolishly in coming to an open breach with your uncle. Granted that his appearance (which annoys and mystifies you) is a self-imposed penalty for some folly of his youth, granted even that he is a liar as well as bungler, I still maintain it would have been wisdom on your part to have kept in touch with him."

As Jack slowly shook his head the lawyer continued,

"There must be money to come to you from your mother, I should imagine, and——"

"Perhaps he has expended it all on my education and bringing up, sir; if so, I shall have the joy of knowing that I am not indebted to him for anything."

Mr. Chalfont Merridew regarded his companion narrowly, silently questioning the source of so much bitter resentment. His next utterance chased the flush from the young man's cheeks, leaving them of lily whiteness. "Who is she?" was the short, simple, significant inquiry.

Now Jack had made up his mind to leave Joanna's name entirely out of the case, and had repeatedly assured himself that the reasons he had given Mr. Merridew for his breach with the banker were more than sufficient to explain and justify that act. The lawyer evidently thought otherwise, and it was manifest he would not now be gainsaid. Indeed, his professional success he largely, though privately, attributed, to the rôle of confessor which he invariably assumed towards his clients.

"I will tell you everything," commenced Jack, but still he hesitated. To speak of his love at all was a hard matter; indeed, what bearing could it have on the case?

"Let me help you," said Merridew, kindly. "She is beautiful, good, accomplished, but unacceptable to your uncle because she lacks wealth and position."

"That is exactly the case," cried Jack, relief and gratitude apparent in his tones. "You can't know her, though; how did you manage to guess so correctly?"

"I don't know her; of course not. She's no countrywoman of mine I should say—certainly not a New Yorker?" "No, indeed," returned Jack. "She and I did lessons together away at Friston-Boughton until I was fourteen. We've known each other ever since we were quite small; but, as I told you last night, I was sent to Switzerland for six years, and when I went back last August and saw Jo.,—I mean Miss Davenant—I.—."

"Confound you, Bess! Why can't you behave yourself! There, there, my pretty! So, so, that's better. I beg your pardon for interrupting you, Mr. Warner, while I congratulate you on keeping your seat. Bess has few tricks, but, unfortunately, only indulges in them when one is off guard. You're all right, I hope!"

Jack was all right, though he confessed it was almost a miracle that he had not been shot on to the road.

"And there was nothing for her to shy at," he remarked. "To rear up like that for nothing seems scarcely natural. Perhaps some part of the saddle is pressing; or a dragon fly might have stung her. Shall I get down and haul her over?"

"She's all right now. I must be more careful. But please continue your story. This lady Miss—who did you say?"

"Miss Davenant," replied Jack.

"What fault has your uncle to find with her? Has he seen her?"

"I don't think so; I don't know. But I do know that he authorised Miss Martha Barnard, in whose house I was born, and where I lived till I went to Switzerland, to tell me he would never give his consent to my having anything to do with Joanna. Miss Barnard was very insulting about it; his money, she

said, would never be thrown away upon her. Oh, she was extremely rude."

To Jack's astonishment the lawyer chuckled.

"Excuse me," he said, "but I can't help being amused when I hear of a stoutish old maid planting herself as a dam in the tidal wave of young love. She's bound to go under, you know; it's only a matter of time and tide. But what surprises me is this: your uncle knowing you, ought to know, just as truly as I did, that you could not care for any girl who was not worthy of his and your position."

"Thank you," said Jack, gratefully. "But Mr. Ronaldson knows far less of me than you do. He has never seemed to wish to gain my confidence or affection."

affection."

"Yet he offers you a good price for your companionship now," observed Merridew.

"Yes, but he wouldn't meet Jo. as an equal."

"So as he wouldn't receive her, you determined to have nothing to do with him! I don't blame you. I should have thought he would have been thankful for you to have married a nice, good girl, such as you describe. It's rather a risky matter to advise young lovers (for one thing advice is about the last thing they'll take, so I rarely offer it). But I don't mind telling you that if your lady friend is all you say, I should stick to her, money or no money."

"I couldn't think twice about it," said Jack, simply,
and that makes me so anxious to find my true name. I wouldn't offer her Mr. Ronaldson's at any price. And I shall have to work to make her a home. But you must know, sir, that I haven't spoke to Joanna yet."

"Not spoken to her!" exclaimed the lawyer,

as he solemnly shook his head. "Foolish, very foolish. If you don't tell a pretty girl you love her before you leave her, the chances are ten to one that some other fellow will, and when you return with name and fortune secured you may find your bird already caged or flown."

"But I told her uncle, Mr. Davenant," rejoined Jack, who, recalling the secret that had leapt to the girl's eyes in the moment of parting, would not be depressed; "he knows my love for her, and he knows that as soon as I have found my true name I shall ask him formally for Jo.'s hand. I do hope we may find it before next November," concluded the young man, fervently, "for then I come of age."

"Well, I'm glad you've spoken to the uncle. We have our work cut out, for November will soon be here. Now," continued the lawyer, lapsing into his professional manner, "did any incident in the narrative of the nouveaux riches I detailed last night strike you as bearing on your case?"

Jack nodded impressively.

"Of course, it may be only a coincidence, yet the year, I take it, corresponds, and the object of the voyage—New Zealand. We'll work this clue for all it's worth. We'll go this afternoon, half-an-hour earlier than the boys, to the Hotel London, and if possible see Mr. Warner and the old Mission Father."

"What about my using the name 'Warner'? Would you advise me to drop it now?"

"Certainly not. The use of it may help to introduce the sort of conversation we are anxious for. I'm not sure whether he and the padre have returned to New York yet. They accompanied the Randalls

to Washington some ten days back when the Sarah Bennett money was made over by the Treasury, and from there they went on to Indiana to see the caves. Mr. Warner is great on geology. Indeed, he is a splendid all-round man, a great traveller and (as I incidentally learned the other day) a contributor to the chief scientific periodicals of the world. For a number of years scientists have endeavoured to find out who 'J. B. W.' is, but no editor could inform them. No money has ever been demanded for his contributions, and no address sent with them."

"He must be a man worth knowing," said Jack. "I do hope he may help us."

"I hope we shall find him at the London this afternoon, we can then arrange an interview for to-morrow. But all this time I have shown you none of our lions, and here we are at Vesey Street, and there's Vedder. We'll get down."

After bestowing a well-deserved pat on poor Bess the two men passed into the Broadway.

"I must show you something or the boys will be eaten up with curiosity as to our doings when we return. Twelve o'clock, I declare! Well, we'll go in and have a look at Old Trinity. Yes, if the church itself is not old, its site is, and so is the parish. As for its wealth, well, Crossus himself was a pauper by comparison, and when I tell you that the original grant for church and parish was called Queen Anne's farm, and was made over to the city in her reign, you won't fight the question of antiquity."

Some time was spent in the beautiful Gothic pile of brown sandstone, a young structure of five-and-twenty summers, standing where two of its ancestors had stood and fallen, its cool and calm interior contrasting markedly with the glare and feverish bustle of the Broadway outside. The oaken pews with their carved scrolls and flowers reminded Jack of the less elaborate but ancient carvings on the pew doors of Friston-Boughton Church.

Then Mr. Merridew told the story of the brave curate, Mr. Inglis, who persisted, after the Declaration of Independence (and on one occasion in the face of a band of soldiers who entered the church with flags flying, drums beating, and bayonets pointed), in beseeching "Almighty God to behold with continual favour, our most gracious sovereign, King George."

"His church was burned, himself sent back to England, while his sovereign, in true republican fashion, was thereafter included in the petition for 'all sorts and conditions of men,'" concluded the lawyer as they

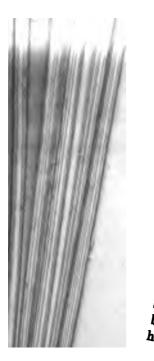
emerged into the outside glare.

"And here is Wall Street," he continued, "as ever, spiritual and material forces rubbing shoulders. This is the arena where fortunes spring up like mushrooms—where, also, they are lost with equal celerity. Here the rail-splitters, the 'corner' men, the creators of bulls and bears,' jostle one against the other in their feverish quest for the almighty dollar. Now I must just call at my office, then we'll get lunch at Delmonico's."

Luncheon over Mr. Merridew remarked:

"We must get rid of this dust, and on all accounts I want you to make the best appearance possible. So much depends upon a first impression. If you make a good one, Mr. Warner may open his mouth in regard to his past; if not, we may whistle and wait indefinitely for the information we want."

It was very good of his patron to take so much interest in his concerns, Jack thought and openly acknowledged



Just at 3.30 t
the Hotel Londo
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Mr. Warner."
Though the space
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Yet how much depen

a lady who, though he dently young and sligh say, "I must apologise before the time I name And the

At the first glance but as Mr. Merridew saw that a lady rose fr eyes until Mr. Merridew, no unmoved spectator, broke in upon the silence with well-simulated surprise:

"Then you know each other?"

"Know each other?" echoed Jack, finding voice, as he led Jo. to a seat. "I should think we do know each other. This is Miss Davenant, the lady of whom I told you this morning."

And the pride thrilling through the young man's tones made the lawyer somewhat apprehensive as to how he would act when the exact state of things had been realised by him. At present it was evident he had not the slightest idea that Miss Randall the nouvelle ricke and Miss Jo. Davenant were one and the same.

"But tell me how you come to be so far from dear old Friston? What a very long honeymoon your uncle has taken; I thought he only intended to go to Paris."

"We haven't seen The Gap since the wedding," said Jo., making a great effort to recover her composure. "I am longing for a breath of moorland air."

"You do look pale," remarked the young fellow with concern; "I fear I startled you coming in like this, but I had no idea of seeing you, no thought but that you were back at The Gap where I so often picture you."

He seemed unable to remove his eyes from the girl's face and for the moment had entirely forgotten the lawyer's presence. As for Jo., joy and confusion at this unexpected meeting had created a perfect tumult in her heart and she vainly struggled to appear at ease. What would Jack say and do when he knew all? And why, knowing nothing, had Mr. Merridew brought him this afternoon—Mr. Merridew, who was well aware



But first let me say that the hotel this afternoon in Mr. Warner. I suppose, a mistake and took us to

And Jack, remembering ingly towards him and wa gentleman apparently deep he held. He raised his question, and shook it, slow

"No mistake!"

Jack was puzzled.

"Then where is Mr. Warn Jack rose from his seat. air, and in some unaccount being victimised.

"Explain," he said, hos Jo. alone remained seated.

"My dear fellow," explai you call Miss Davenant is in sole inheritrix of the fortunmany vers in soft white silk in which roses of palest pink were enwoven, and whose adornment was priceless lace at wrists and throat, told him the truth he would never have guessed from its wearer's countenance.

"My God, is it possible?" he at length exclaimed, almost in a whisper.

Jo. was ready to sink to the floor as she noted the effect of his recognition of the truth. The light of joy had vanished from his eye, his figure drooped, his whole attitude was that of one stricken sharply, suddenly, irrevocably.

In deep distress, but with a world of tenderness in tone and touch, Jo. was beside him, her hand upon his arm, her glorious eyes gemmed with unshed tears. But Jack saw her not, the unpretending richness of her gown claimed all his thoughts, for the story it told was the story of his own undoing.

"Qu'as tu donc?" cried the girl, her voice trembling with emotion. "Qu'as tu donc? Ecoutez! Je vais renoncer toute suite cette fortune bête; J'en parlerai——"

At this moment the door at the farther end of the long room opened, and the nasal tones were again heard proclaiming the advent of "Miss and Mr. Horatio and Mr. Granger Merridew."

For Jack the tension was broken, and, seizing his hat, without look or word of farewell, he made his exit through a door on his left, and rushing down the staircase, was unaware that he passed and almost upset Mr. and Mrs. Davenant, who were hastening to welcome their expected guests.

CHAPTER VI.

Farewell! since all divides us now, the heart
Must come away. My thoughts no longer dare
Fly to thy breast and lodge in secret there:
But like storm-driven birds outnested, dart
Hither and thither. Lo, in every part
Shattered I see my bower of patience, bare
My hope's green garden, ruin everywhere.
Farewell! now all proclaims it. Where thou art
I may not be: these eyes must lose their light,
Silence invade mine ear; death, death to all
That yesterday was very life! I call
These truths into my soul—it will not hear,
But smiles within me still, as one whose ear
Is held by distant music in the night.

LAURENCE ALMA-TADEMA.

WITH the recovery of his physical powers Jack's mental faculties sprang at once into vigorous action, and as he stepped on to the busy thoroughfare the atmosphere of unrest surrounding him was reflected in the turmoil of his soul. There thought jostled thought, to be in turn hustled, thrown down and trampled upon by other thoughts equally boisterous and impetuous.

Reasoning under such conditions was impossible, yet Jack attempted it. Why had he been such a fool as to refuse the banker's offer? With the name and fortune Mr. Ronaldson had been ready to bestow he might have ventured to approach Jo., even in this hour of her wealth. As it was he, the nameless, the friendless, the poor was for ever cut off from her!

"By my own act, too, and in the teeth of the advice

of those who only desired my good." So he cried in bitterness of spirit, unmindful of the jostling crowds, who were indeed equally unmindful of him.

"If I had had but the commonest sense I should never have left Heather's Edge without telling her of my love-never have risked the possibility of losing her. Merridew himself said as much this morning. As it is, I've no claim on her, nothing to go back on, nothing to plead. I haven't even a name to offer her! fortune, love all staked on a single chance! The veriest bumpkin on the face of the earth would have shown more sense! Now, now that she is rolling in wealth, how can I, how dare I go to her? Lovers? She'll have lovers by the score, and I, through my dumb folly in the past, must stand aside, while they pretend to discover her excellencies excellencies they would have been blind to were it not for the golden halo that surrounds her! But how dare I talk like She is an angel, transcendent in beauty and goodness, and had I name and fortune and she were penniless, I could never, never be worthy of her."

So, sometimes gaining audible expression, sometimes in a silence more oppressive than speech, the bitter conflict with circumstance waged in the young man's breast. Time was as heedlessly passed as the throngers of the streets, and Jack was equally careless as to his whereabouts.

As Old Trinity rang out the hour of five his elbowing career was brought to a sudden stop by the sound of a sharp, familiar voice, and he became, for the first time, aware that for the past hour he must have been hurrying round the square in which the Hotel London stood and before which he was now brought to a stand-still.

"No, young man, you shall not enter here! I will not permit it!"

And the form of Miss Martha Barnard seemed, to Jack's perturbed vision, to widen out indefinitely until it stretched across the spacious opening that gave ingress to the hotel. He had no idea this lady was in New York, but nothing in his present condition had power to surprise him. He was about to pass on with lifted hat when she seized his arm.

"And it will be of no use for you to attempt to call later on, when I'm back in my rooms, for I shall give strict orders that Mr. Jack Ronaldson is not to be admitted here."

Perhaps something in the young fellow's appearance made her give pause, for she added in the nearest approach to an apologetic tone she could muster, "I gave my word to your uncle that you should have nothing to do with Jo., and I'm a woman who keeps her word, as you know. I told him, too, that whenever I knew where you were he should know, and he'll have a letter sent off to him to-night. I don't want to know your address—it will be for him to discover that if he wants it."

Jack as yet had said nothing, but that he was in an extremely unpleasant position was very evident to Mr. Merridew who, at this moment appeared at the top of the hotel steps. Smothering all token of the relief he experienced at sight of him, he hastened to join the pair. With a bow to the lady, he said:

"Ah, Jack," using that familiar name for the first time, "I want to take you over to Governor's Island before dinner. Please excuse him, Miss Barnard, he shall call and pay his respects to you another day. I think your number is 84, Fifty-seventh Street, is it not?"

AN OATH IN HEAVEN.

Miss Martha could scarcely believe her eyes as she saw the American lawyer, of whom she had stood somewhat in awe, fraternising with her former charge, who was in disgrace with everybody on account of his obstinacy and independence. How had the two become acquainted. Astonishment made her dumb for a moment, and in that moment Merridew and Jack walked off together.

Anxious to give the young fellow time to recover himself the lawyer chatted exclusively of passing objects as they wended their way to a theatre-box office.

"I should like you and the boys to see Joseph Jefferson in Rip Van Winkle. He's playing it at the Olympia to-night. I'll telegraph to my sister to come along with them after dinner. We'll take ours on Governor's Island and join them later."

Jack was dimly grateful for an arrangement which would postpone his pupils' inevitable discussion of the nouveaux riches, and more thankful still to find he was not expected to carry on a conversation with their father.

"You must see Agnes Perry before the Old Broadway closes," remarked the latter, when he and Jack were bowling down to South Ferry. To himself he said, "It would never do for him to see her to-night, he might be inclined to regard Old Love Letters as prophetic. Agnes would unman him entirely." But his manner was extremely matter-of-fact, and gave no indication whatever that anything of an extraordinary nature had occurred. Yet Jack was not slow to discern and, with something like bitterness, apply to himself a certain significance in his companion's otherwise commonplace observations.

"There's a big thing we're putting up," remarked

the latter as they passed extensive building operations newly commenced. "The plans for it have been accepted by a specially appointed set of commissioners and endorsed as satisfactory, indeed, admirable, by many of our leading citizens. But if they are carried out we shall have a costly white elephant and an ugly one to boot. It's surprising how differently plans work out on paper, and in bricks and mortar."

Jack pulled himself together. It was abundantly evident Mr. Merridew entertained no doubt that his, Jack's, plans had been proved unworkable, and was anxious he should recognise the fact at once and form others. This attitude of the elder man was in itself a means of bracing. Yet Jack hesitated. His plan had cost so much to make, he could not bring himself to destroy it at a moment's notice. Moreover, its destruction would mean the destruction of all that made life worth living. Yet if it must go !

If a hope were doomed to extinction it certainly would be better for everybody that it should be quickly and effectually put out. That there would be fewer disagreeable odours in the world if people would deal sensibly with flickering hopes was an undeniable truism. But when Jack turned to look at his own and bring a sharp puff, puff to bear upon it, he found it burning as brightly as it had burnt this very morning—when he had pictured Jo. at The Gap in her always dainty attire, her harebell eyes hinting the secret they had surprised in her heart. Surely, surely, spite of Mr. Merridew's truism, the flame need not be extinguished.

The delicious breeze from the ocean as they stepped aboard the steam ferry seemed rather to endow it with fresh life. Presently the two were again on terra firma, and the lawyer was seriously narrating, to his uninterested companion, the history of Castle William (the circular battery of granite at the westernmost point of the island) in the amphitheatre formed by its walls. It was a comfort to be away from the jostle and stir of the big city, now half a mile distant, but Jack tried in vain to simulate any interest, even in the story of the Confederate Beall's ghost, who was said to pace the parapet on moonlight nights.

Yes, the view here was very fine, he admitted. Yet Jack saw not the blinking waves of sea and river, as the sun in its setting poured a flood of light upon them they were unable to meet without flinching; the deep tender blue of the hills on the other shore, as they stood out from their crimson background in the west, was unnoted. For him there was no colour anywhere, save only that flame of hope within his breast; must he feed it, or must he blow it out?

And Mr. Merridew became at length aware that he was overdoing his part, that his companion's enforced interest was waning rapidly. So, as they left the parapet and took their way along the quiet shore lying between Castle William and Buttermilk Channel, the lawyer threw his disguise away and, motioning Jack to seat himself upon a block of granite on the grass, he at once attacked the question that occupied both their minds.

In as few words as possible he told Jack what the latter had dimly surmised, that his love's name was in reality Randall, she being the only child of Sarah Bennett and Fred Randall. That her father and mother did not marry till 1849, upon Randall's return from New Zealand, and that the couple went directly after

the marriage (which took place in an East End London church) to Amiens. There they both died of cholers when the little Joanne was scarcely old enough to realise her loss, her great grandmother, Mdme. Davenant, whom Mrs. Randall was nursing, having predeceased them about a year. Had not Joanne discarded her surname for the more euphonious Davenant of her uncle, the money would doubtless have long since been made over to her. Her father was always weakly, and hoped till the day of his death that the New Zealand Land Company would obtain redress from the English Government for the monies expended for and by the emigrants, for Randall had put his all into that venture.

Jack heard, too, that it was entirely owing to Miss Martha Barnard that Jo.'s whereabouts and even existence had been made known. But without giving the young man an opportunity to express either surprise or distress at his recital the lawyer continued:

"I owe you an apology, and here I tender it. I thought, though, it would be better both for you and Miss Davenant to meet for the first time alone—and my presence counted for nought. Had I given you any hint you would have refused to see her?"

"Most likely I should, sir, but then-"

"Now don't scold, my dear fellow. Miss Davenant, for so she still desires to be called, came down pretty hard upon me for not letting her know you were in New York. Oh, I have been quite sufficiently punished. I told her, of course, that I had not the remotest idea that you and she were old acquaintances until you told me so this morning. I can't say, though, that the possibility did not strike me when you named Friston-Boughton last night, but——"

"Ah, I see now why you asked me that impertinent question, 'Who is she?' I hope, sir, you are satisfied with your diplomacy or your policy, whichever you may please to call it," and with a vicious kick Jack sent a piece of flint to find an early grave in the ocean. "Perhaps," he continued, with a poor attempt to conceal his distress, "you will try to see this Mr. Warner for me to-morrow, and if the——" But, unable to proceed, he sprang to his feet with what object he knew not.

"Come, come, lad, don't be foolish," said Merridew, as he, too, rose and linked his arm in that of his young friend. "Surely, you don't think so badly of Miss Davenant as to suppose this money will make any difference in her friendship for you?"

"But how can I go to her, sir; I, who have neither a name nor a penny piece to offer her?"

"Tut, tut! Don't talk nonsense. As for a name, I promise you I'll find your father if I move New York City from stem to stern. So don't let me hear any more of that rubbishy talk. I had given you credit for more sense. Supposing you discover that your father was related to royalty, or that Miss Davenant were a beggar to-morrow, would you give her up? course not. There are fifty ways, I tell you, by which a man can make himself the social equal of a wealthy wife, whatever Horatio may say or think to the contrary. Now this ought to put heart into you, though you scarcely deserve such comforting. After my sister and the boys had gone, Miss Davenant begged me to find you and assure you that nothing could, would, or should make even the slightest difference in her regard for you. She told me how the two of you had been friends in childhood, and more.

and Mrs. Davenant, too, were greatly interested hear of you. Mr. J. B. Warner is expected to ret to-night, and I have promised to take you to Hotel London to-morrow evening. It will certai be your own fault if you come back to dine with But we must get our dinner immediately, or we almiss Jefferson in the opening scene."

"You are too good to me, sir," murmured Ja

gratefully, "but give me time to think."

To himself Merridew said, "A fellow who, with a straw of evidence, has built up such a firm belief his mother's honour is a fellow worth working and, by Uncle Sam, I'll wager the father turns trumps."

But all he said aloud was "Poor Bess! She wo shy the next time she hears Miss Davenant mitioned."



CHAPTER VII.

And how do I like my position?
And what do I think of New York?
And now in my higher ambition
With whom do I waltz, flirt, or talk?"
But know, if you haven't got riches,
And are poor, dearest Jack, and all that,
That my heart's somewhere there in the ditches,
And you've struck it, on Poverty Flat.

BRET HARTE.

WHEN Martha Barnard had somewhat recovered from her astonishment she ascended the hotel elevator and bent her steps to her sister's bedroom, telling an attendant to inform Mrs. Davenant of her presence there.

But on her entry she discovered Mary standing at a window overlooking nothing but slated roofs of varying heights. She appeared somewhat anxious as she gazed down upon them, though in reality her thoughts were fairly divided between Jo.'s distress and the reflections cast by cloud and sky upon a tenement below. While Jack had been pacing the square a shower had fallen, and now these undried slates appeared to Mary's eye as sheets of fairest opal, for their lovely blue grew now deeper, now paler, and again merged into a delicious green with faintest tinge of crimson as sun, sky, or cloud in turn, or together, attempted to efface all trace of the shower.

On Mr. Merridew's departure Mary had left uncle

and niece together as she often did. She wished them both to feel as free and as close to each other as in the old days before her marriage. Her advice was never obtruded, though her sympathy was quick and generous as ever. She was well aware of Jo.'s anxiety to return to The Gap, and of the girl's desire that their mode of living there should not be materially altered, at least for some time to come. And that indefinite period Mary rightly translated would expire only when Jack should again appear at The Gap, or when he should have given proof that he had forgotten its inmates.

But who could have foreseen that he would appear now, and that the news of this wonderful fortune should have been suddenly thrust upon him? No wonder he had been upset; no wonder if he were filled with regrets that he had not accepted Mr. Ronaldson's offer. Poor fellow!

But Mary's thoughts were chiefly of Jo. She had talked somewhat wildly after Miss Merridew and her nephews had departed about giving back this money. She did not want it, she never had wanted it, and she would not touch a penny more of it, if it were to cut her off from her friends, if Jack were to be allowed to consider it as a barrier to their former intimacy.

Mr. Merridew had spoken wisely and kindly. Certainly this money ought not to divide old friends. No doubt Jack was somewhat upset—that was only natural; but he knew Jack, and was convinced he would do nothing rash. Then the lawyer had spoken of the hope he entertained that Mr. Warner might be able to throw some light upon the mystery attaching to Jack's birth. But Jo. was still fearful. Jack had looked so strange when he rushed from the room—would not Mr. Merridew go and look for him?

"Oh, he's all right, my dear young lady," the lawyer had said; "if he's not with me by dinner-time I'll send you a telegram."

And now Jo. and her uncle were having a talk. Martin was so good, he would comfort the poor child. Without a doubt she would marry Jack, spite of all Martha had said and devised.

But there stood Martha looking brimful of news and importance. Mary turned at once. Her sister might have seen Jack; if so, he was safe.

"Oh, here you are," was Martha's greeting. "Now I needn't tell you I've seen Jack Ronaldson, for it's clear to me you've seen him. But one thing is not clear, so I'll ask you to explain."

And the lady seated herself on an ottoman; the heat of the day, combined with stoutness of build and an abnormal thirst for information, was fatiguing. "Now how does he come to know Mr. Merridew? That lawyer doesn't go walking off arm-in-arm with a young fellow as he did five minutes ago unless he knows him pretty well. Now tell me."

"Excuse me a moment, sister; I'll be back directly." And Mary disappeared, and a second later, having knocked at the door of Jo.'s little sitting-room, she entered and said, "Jack's all right, dear. Martha saw him with Mr. Merridew five minutes ago."

"I wanted to tell Martin that you had seen Jack with Mr. Merridew," Mary explained, for Martha wore a somewhat injured air when her sister returned to her.

"How do they know each other so well, you ask? Why, Jack has been travelling half over Europe with Mr. Merridew's two sons since he left us last August, and he only brought them back here yesterday. Of course, Jack knew nothing about Jo.'s fortune; indeed,

he had no idea that she was in New York. It upset him a good deal, I fear, but——"

"Well, I've told him pretty plainly that he will not be admitted here if he calls," remarked Martha, with grim decision.

"Martha, how dare you give orders to or about him!" cried Mary. "It is for Martin to say who shall or shall not visit here."

"Don't attempt to browbeat me," returned Martha, with exasperating coolness. "I know what I'm doing, and I know that my duty is to see that Mr. Ronaldson's wishes are carried out, as well as the promises I made to him. But leaving Mr. Ronaldson out of the question, you and Martin must be daft indeed to encourage Jack to dangle round Joanna now. What is he, even with Mr. Ronaldson's money, which it's ten to one if he will ever have? What is his name—Ronaldson? Jones? Eh?"

"Don't talk in that way, sister, of a boy we have known and loved from babyhood. He is not to be blamed because he has no name, neither is he to be despised, but rather to be honoured, because he has no fortune. He gave up the chance, nay, the certainty of fortune for Jo.'s sake, as you well know. I really am ashamed that you should think and speak as you do. I'm thankful Mr. Merridew saw Jack and took him off. Your unkind words would cut him keenly, poor fellow."

"And your foolish milk-and-water ways will land you and Martin and Joanna in a muddle. If anyone has the right to give advice on this matter it is certainly myself. Would Joanna have ever had this money if I had not insisted upon having the certificate of her birth from Davenant? Answer me."

"I don't know whether she might not have had it later through some other channel, sister, but we all of us often say we wish you had never replied to the advertisement you saw in *Lloyd's*."

"That's gratitude, and from people who set themselves up to have finer feelings than their fellows." exclaimed Martha, sarcastically, as she untied her bonnet-strings and fanned herself with a newspaper she carried. "It's not every woman of sixty who would have taken the trouble to cross the Channel and the ocean to put money into the pocket of a girl that was neither kith nor kin to her. And this is my reward! However, I shall not neglect my duty because folks are ungrateful, and whether you and Martin deliberately choose to neglect the opportunity of making your niece a Countess, as she well might be-I shall write to Mr. Ronaldson to-night, and I shall tell him it is my wish that Jack does not visit us while we are here, but that I am unable to do more than express my wishes, seeing I am not in my own house. One word before I go (Bridget will have tea waiting for me), let me again urge upon you and Martin the wisdom of returning to England as soon as possible."

"We are all anxious to do so."

"Don't interrupt, please. By England I mean London. Take a house near Hyde Park. Have Jo. presented at Court, and you will soon have plenty of suitors for her hand—suitors Mr. Ronaldson and Lord Clanfalkland himself would be thankful to receive as guests."

"Yet once you told me that Jo. might be thankful

if Lord Clanfalkland's-"

"Hold your tongue, Mary. You have no sense of decorum. Whatever I may have said in the past I

have no wish to deny; but conditions, circumstances all were so different a year ago. Besides, the girl herself—who would have guessed that she would ever have turned out such a beauty, a little rough-headed, pale-faced chit as she was at twelve? If I had only the handling of her fortunes she would soon have a title. There are heaps of the nobility that would be thankful to have her purse. And now she has a picture in the Sal—whatever you call that Gallery in Paris—she will have fame as well as money. You'll ruin her prospects with your fads, though. However, I shall do my best for her, spite of your ingratitude."

And the sisters, kissing in perfunctory fashion,

parted.

Mary, left by herself, did not return to the window, but paced up and down the room. The difficulty in dealing with Martha arose chiefly from her habit of advancing undeniable truths as arguments. There was no denying that she, and she only, had brought this wealth to Jo. How strange that she should have insisted upon having the certificate of Jo.'s birth from Martin, strange that she should have copied it, and stranger still that she should have seen the advertisement offering a handsome reward for information concerning the child or children, living or dead, of Sarah Bennet or Randall. Certainly there was no denying that circumstances had entirely changed for all the inmates of Heather's Edge and The Gap during the past year. Neither could there be any manner of doubt that Jo. was very beautiful. Within the past nine months her beauty had impressed itself upon all who came in contact with her. Decidedly she could hold her own in dignity and loveliness with any titled beauty in England or any country. Money, of course,

AN OATH IN HEAVEN.

brought with it its own peculiar responsibilities and duties, yet Mary felt convinced that Jo. would make over every penny of her fortune to some charitable institution were Jack to be driven from her side on account of it. And rightly, too, Mary thought. Had not Jack foregone as much for her, and not money only but name and position? Martha's arguments might be undeniable, unanswerable from a certain point of view, but Mary's sympathies were entirely with Jack and Jo. Indeed, she owned to herself that if it were possible Martin should manifest a disposition to adopt Martha's arguments, she—Mary—should feel compelled to aid the lovers.

Here a knock at the door was followed by the entrance of Davenant.

"Poor child!" he said; "she is happier now that she knows Jack is with Merridew. I think Merridew was somewhat to blame, though, in not preparing either one or both of them for the meeting. She is gone to lie down, and will be glad if you will go to her, Mary, in about an hour's time. She will be all right by dinner-time, she says."

Then Mary told him of Martha's visit; how she had forbidden Jack to call at the hotel, and of her intention to inform Mr. Ronaldson at once that the young man was in New York.

"She may tell the banker just what she chooses—I mind not. But we will not let her order—that is to say, spoil our little Jo.'s life. No, I have promised the child that while we are here Jack shall come and go as he did at The Gap in the days when they were children. And when he is of age, quite his own master, then he shall say what he wishes to me and to her. He has the heart of gold, Mary, as you know—and

how the lawyer did praise him! Think what it is for one so young to have had those boys all to himself for months!"

And Jo., in her darkened chamber, was rejoicing in all that Mr. Merridew had detailed. As she lay on her bed she held Jack's parting gift in her hand. The soft, flexible binding seemed to return the pressure of her fingers, and now and again she would open it at the fly-leaf and press her burning cheek or lips beneath the writing—"Jo., from Jack." Beneath, because it was there his hand had rested when he traced the words, and so often had her cheek or lip touched that spot she saw with shame its whiteness was for ever dimmed.

But he was coming to-morrow, and Dads had promised to be no more angry with him! How strange it was! Dads had thrown Jack over last year because he would not take his uncle's riches. This year it was Jo. who had the riches—Jo., for whose sake Jack had willingly given up name and fortune. And Jo. smiled to herself as the dimmed page of the little book rested against her hot cheek, for she had resolved that all this wealth of hers should be made over to Jack as soon as ever they two should be married.

Why, there was no one to compare with him in looks or ways. She knew well enough (for how could she help knowing?) that if she but lifted her finger half-adozen men would fall at her feet. It was so even at Mentone before this fortune had come to her—at Mentone, where her uncle and Mary had taken her after the Paris visit because they thought she was ailing. And it was when they were there that Miss Martha had come bringing the news of some money that would be hers if she would go to New York for it. How

Jo. had hated the idea of this money lest Jack should hear of it, and never come near her again!

But now all was well, and Jack was coming to see her to-morrow! And his love was just as strong as ever, or he would never have looked so sad when he heard of her wealth. Perhaps he would refuse her money as he had refused the banker's. Then if he would not have it, Jo. was determined she would not. Well, she would have a long talk with Mr. Warner about it when he returned from Indiana; he would understand and arrange things just as she wished, for she and he were great friends.

He had known her father, the father she but dimly remembered—the father who, so Mr. Warner said, had once interposed to save that gentleman's life. Ah, it was good to have had a father so brave, and with so good a heart! And to think that the only piece of jewellery she had ever possessed was a little brooch Mr. Warner had sent as a parting gift to her father!

It would be an easy matter to make Mr. Warner understand that she would be happier without this money. Yet how could she explain? No, it would not be at all easy, but Mary would help her.

What a lot she had to tell Jack when he came! There was the picture she had painted in France which now hung in the Salon, and much, much more. And he was coming to-morrow!

CHAPTER VIII.

A passionate outpouring of the founts
Of deepest tenderness and grief; . . . A song
Through all whose tearful sadness there yet shone
A mild, unshaken star, the faith sublime
That ever pointed upward, a great trust
In Him who doeth all things well.

G. STREET

JOSEPH JEFFERSON'S rendering of Rip Van Winkle might, or might not, be beyond praise, for Jack, after sitting through the performance, was incapable of expressing any opinion concerning it. His thoughts were entirely occupied with his own concerns, and though his eyes were upon the stage, his critical faculties were absorbed in the examination of various rôles which, on varying pretexts, presented themselves as certain to secure distinction to whom-so-ever decided to adopt them.

The arguments and, above all, the pledge to discover his father the lawyer had brought forward and made on Governor's Island, together with the messages from Jo. and Davenant, had raised his fainting courage. Despair was ousted; the mist she had created about his outlook was vanishing; possibilities were assuming solid proportions, and once more Jo. stood forth the goal of his ambition, as she was, and would ever be, the queen of his heart and life.

There was logic, good logic, he silently affirmed, in Mr. Merridew's reductio ad absurdum. As if Jo.

without a penny were not a thousand times more desirable than gold, yea, than much fine gold; a worthy mate, indeed, for any royal scion.

But fortunately for Jack no royal scion now had power to gain her ear; of that he was convinced, for all at once Memory presented him with a picture she had had for some hours in her keeping—a picture which blotted out entirely the stage, its figures and equipment. In their stead the lovely figure of a girl, with harebell eyes, filled his vision, a girl whose hand rested upon his arm detainingly, whose voice broke upon his ear in a tender passion of entreaty.

"Qu'as tu donc? Qu'as tu donc? Ecoutez! Je vais renoncer toute suite, cette fortune bête!"

Jack stirred upon his seat; his eyes were film-bound, his mind made up. Jo. at all cost, even the cost of his pride!

Then he fell again to the consideration of ways and means, for he was determined that the home, if nothing else, should be of his providing. He would, moreover, make himself the social equal of his wife, as Mr. Merridew phrased it. Fifty ways were open to the attainment of that end, the lawyer had said, and, while the bright chorus "Rip, Rip, Rip!" resounded through the house Jack busily weighed pros. and cons.

Yet nothing could be done until the missing father was found; for his mother's sake, as much as for his own and Joanna's—nay, more—the search must be pressed and New York City, as Mr. Merridew had promised, "moved from stem to stern." Surely God would Himself aid in establishing the honour of one who had so nobly devoted herself to His suffering poor?

But the play was over, and two minutes later the Merridew party were warmly discussing it and the chief actor as the carriage rapidly conveyed them to Fifth Avenue. In this new interest the boys forgot for the time being the nouveaux riches, and Jack gained his chamber well pleased to have successfully escaped Horatio's criticisms.

"I generally get a walk in the Park after my bath," the lawyer had quietly remarked to the young man as he bade him good-night. "If you care to join me I shall leave the house at seven sharp."

On reaching his room the question as to what profession or occupation he should engage in again obtruded itself. There were, of course, eminent lawyers, and eminent lawyers sometimes, and after many years of successful practice, were elevated to the rank of judge. Then there was the profession of letters. Writing might prove to be his métier, and if he cultivated style and all that makes for literature he might find distinction as an author.

This suggestion gave Jack pleasure. He knew his classics well; he was no mean linguist; he possessed also a first-hand acquaintanceship with most European cities and works of art. Moreover, the life of an author appeared to Jack's inexperienced eye a life of perfect freedom.

He had kept a journal of his late travels with the Merridew boys. He would have a look at it and see how it read. He might even finish it now, for his mind was too busy for sleep. He had not written a line on the passage from Hamburg to New York, for that—his first sea-voyage of any length—he had determined to enjoy to the full.

Where had the thing got to? It was certainly in

his bag at Hamburg, for he now remembered he had placed it in the deep pocket that ran all along one side, lest the German officials, with their ready suspiciousness, should light upon it and imagine the document contained plans of their border defences. It was wonderful how much this bag of his mother's held. He really must turn it out.

"I don't think it has been emptied since I left Heather's Edge. Ho! Here's the little ikon I bought for Jo. I thought I put that in the box with my ties!"

But this was not the ikon; that was square, this was oval and smaller than the ikon.

"Horatio must have slipped this in to give me a surprise. How he could have done so without my knowledge quite gets over me!"

Walking across to the gas-jet to examine his find more closely, Jack exclaimed with delight as his eye fell upon one of the most exquisitely-painted miniatures he had ever seen. And he knew good work when he saw it.

The portrait was either by Cosway or Sullivan, most likely the latter, and must be at least fifty years old. A lovely woman in a low, square bodice of pale green silk, and of a charming figure, stood out against a sky of a warm green hue. Her lily and rose complexion was wrought with consummate art, her hair of a rich brown fell into natural waves and curls; a knot of primroses appeared in her stomacher, and about her slender, well-poised neck a string of pearls.

"Where could Horatio have picked up this gem? But that youth never had the money it must or ought to have cost. It is a treasure, and no mistake!"

By this time Jack had the bag upon a chair beneath

the gas-jet, and after diving again into the deep side pocket, he brought up another miniature, evidently the companion portrait, probably the husband of the lady in the bodice of pale green.

The conviction now impressed itself upon him that these miniatures must have been in the bag when Miss Mary made it over to him last August, and that they were connected with the story of his birth. But why had he not seen them then ?

He now proceeded to take out every article from the pocket, but discovered nothing more than he had himself placed there. Certainly those miniatures were not visible when he packed the bag before leaving Heather's Edge, or was it possible that they were there in some pocket or receptacle then concealed from view? Jack had heard of false sides and bottoms to boxes and bags, secret drawers, and such things.

His excitement was intense, though under firm control. He would destroy the bag utterly, if need be, in his endeavour to solve this mystery. Taking his penknife he cut the leather pocket right out and then discovered that the bag had, as he had conjectured, a false bottom, the spring of which was concealed by the deep side pocket. The bottom was not more than an inch in thickness, and when Jack drew from it several broad sheets of old-fashioned letter-paper neatly folded, he understood how it was the miniatures had not bulged or made their presence noticeable. They had lain beneath the smoothly-folded paper and close to the true bottom of the bag.

No doubt the rough-and-tumble life the bag had known of late had set the spring in action, and so dislodged the miniatures. But that they should have remained there, together with these no doubt important papers, for more than twenty years, impressed Jack with the feeling that their concealment had been nothing less than the handiwork of Destiny.

As he unfolded the packet one or two loose papers fell to the ground. But he gave them no heed, eye and attention riveted upon the fine pointed writing of the document he held, which bore in clear though fading ink the heading:

Diary of Eleanor Gavin Ronaldson, 1846.

Jack recognised he was on the brink of an important discovery. What might not these pages disclose? But bracing himself to meet the unknown he sat down, and soon became absorbed in the story his mother had set forth.

The journal commenced—as the date proved—directly after the brother and sister separated for the two years' absence Miss Barnard had told him of before he left Heather's Edge last August. And Jack was surprised at the very evident relief this temporary separation afforded the writer; relief, not merely because she was leaving Hurstwick for a time, but relief because she was parting from her brother. Yet that she loved him very dearly was abundantly manifest.

But as Jack continued to read, he soon discovered there was someone, even in 1846, she had loved still better. Some one named Jim; some one who had died years before; some one of whom her brother, by his peculiar mode of wearing his hair, put her in constant and painful remembrance; some one, moreover, whom she, the writer, considered herself largely responsible for trouble he had evidently undergone. In Dublin

she would not have these continual reminders of "the happy days" when she and Tom and Jim "played the fool" together.

Jim most certainly (so the journal inferred) knew nothing of her love, the love of a girl of seventeen, who had even then resolved that none but Jim should ever woo her. Even Tom was not made acquainted with the girl's secret.

"Poor Tom! It helps him, I suppose, to wear his hair-coat. Ah, well!"

Then came a description of the horrors of the potato famine, the call of the Rev. John Jones, and the writer's glad response. Afterwards the story of the emigration project, the landing and detention in New York, the coming of a Spanish priest to minister to the party of Irish the writer had in charge.

From the chronicling of this latter circumstance the whole atmosphere of the journal changed. The writer's devotion to her charges was as great as ever, perhaps greater. But a wondrous joy had place of the calm pleasure her work had hitherto afforded.

The "Jim" she had so long regarded as dead was actually alive—she had seen and talked with him! Self-regret was banished, her outlook was brightly tinted, a song of gladness sped the hours from dawn to dark.

Then came passages to read which Jack somehow felt to be an injustice to the dead. Was it right that any should enter the very holy of holies of a woman's heart? To do so was certainly sacrilege, albeit a revelation.

Did good women love as this woman had loved? What if Jo. loved him with a love so pure, so strong, so tender, and, withal, so elevating! His whole being

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thrilled as he contemplated it. Could he ever be worthy of such affection?

Again the journal claimed him. The importance of keeping the unexpected meeting with "Jim" a secret until the brother (away in New Zealand) had returned was more than once referred to, as well as the necessity for caution in disclosing the very questionable fact of his existence to his father, the Marquis of Pierhampton, until the disposition of that nobleman towards the son with whom he had quarrelled could be ascertained.

Here Jack unconsciously dropped the diary and, in his agitation, paced the room. Could it indeed be possible that he was the grandson of the Marquis of Pierhampton, grandson of the nobleman whose sole surviving son was not only childless, but an invalid? If so, then he, Jack, the hitherto nameless one, was heir to the marquisate! Jo? Jo. a marchioness? That was the very position for her! But softly; the marriage he had yet to read of—yet, perhaps, to prove.

Deeply agitated, he unconsciously stooped and picked up the hitherto unheeded papers that had fallen to the floor. A moment afterwards he became aware that he held between his fingers the long and vainly-sought certificate of his mother's marriage with "James Bagshot Warner, of Pierton Abbey, Hurstwick, England," a letter, too, from that individual penned on board the Clytie, as well as a letter in his mother's handwriting addressed to "Mr. Thomas Ronaldson, Hurstwick, England"—this last dated a month before the writer finally left New York. With difficulty Jack restrained himself from going straightway to Mr. Merridew. There was no mistake, of that

he was convinced. But now his thoughts were a longer of Jo., no longer even of himself, but of the two cut off so cruelly from each other just when the future had worn such reseate hues. Eagerly Jac returned to the journal in the hope of discovering further tidings of his father. But though no mosessential fact than the loose papers contained was be found in its pages, Jack was able to understar how comparatively easy it had been for his moth to leave her charges for thirty-six hours without proving comment. Then no home such as New You has now at the Battery existed for arriving emigrants consequently the members of Eleanor Ronaldson party were scattered, and, many of them being sich she rarely saw them all on the same day.

The hand of Fate Jack seemed to detect in all th business. Evidently his mother had had no desir to marry until her brother's return; but when, after accompanying Jim to Boston to see him off by the fast ship (one of the first steamboats to run to New Zealand), that vessel was delayed at its mooring another twenty-four hours, she had been unable the resist her lover's pleadings. And if the marriage preliminaries required by English law had been in vogue in Boston the marriage could not have taken place "and then," Jack silently commented, "I should be non-existent.

The irony of fate culminated in the fact that the last entry in the journal had been made at Heather's Edge the very morning of the day on which the write died. It was not possible for Jack to read these fina words, so redolent of hope, so sentient of love, with undimmed eyes:

The thought that Jim may come with Tom to-day to take m

on to Hurstwick fills me with joy too deep for words. How often have I blamed myself for letting him go from me; sometimes, too, have I blamed myself for yielding at the last moment to his prayer that we should marry. Yet no, I would not have things other than they are; it is so sweet to know that he is in very truth my dear, dear love, my sweet sweetheart, my husband! Ah! what joy will be his when he knows of our little son. Fly, fly! oh dragging hours, and bring my dear love back to me! But it may be that he and Tom have not yet met, and that I must tell all the wondrous story before he can return. Tom will not, perhaps, at first believe; he will, perhaps, be angry that Jim is not with me. But it is I myself who sent my dear love away; I only am to blame for this. Jim, dear heart, would have me go with him then and there. Ah! how masterful he was, but I was firm. My work remained undone; I had upon me the care of all those unhappy Irish. How could I leave them in their misery and drown myself in happiness: I, I who had already drunk of it from a brimming cup? Ah! that parting! But courage, it is now the hour for meeting; my heart almost stands still; it is so full of joy, for if Jim comes not with Tom we shall see him soon at Hurstwick. No, no, Thou God of Love, who hast the wide world for Thy pleasure ground and eternity for enjoyment, Thou wilt not, Thou couldst not, snatch our tiny garden plot of happiness from us.

Later. These people here tell me I must not expect "my husband" before ten o'clock to-morrow. Evidently they think Tom is my husband, and it will not do to undeceive them, or Miss Martha (the elder sister) might put me to the door, she is so very, very proper. The singular thing is that, as Tom and Jim have both been to New Zealand, when I am speaking of the latter, these people imagine I am referring to the former. But what does it matter? Next year Jim and I and little Jack will come here and tell these sisters the wonderful story. Supposing Tom should not have reached Hurstwick! I will telegraph to-morrow for Mr. Brotherton. I feel I must tell someone my secret before I enter Hurstwick. He is a man to be trusted, and he would go for me to the Marquis. Ah, if only Mr. Jones had lived he would have done this for me long ago! But I am getting despondent. Wake up, O heart; thy love flies to thy side. No longer shalt thou bear thy burden of secrecy; no longer shall cruel tongues prick nor cruel glances stab thee. Thy suffering time is spent; joy is at hand. Why, Tom will have to cut his curls off! What a glad man he'll be! But I wish he could have been with me to-day. Now, my sole confidante, my book, I put you away for the last time in your safe hiding-place with the miniatures and my marriage lines. The letter I wrote to Tom explaining all will not be needed, yet I will leave it; one never knows what may happen. Why do I thus forbode sorrow? The false bottom I had made for these precious things will discover itself to anyone who diligently searches the

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bag, and Tom will search diligently; the spring acts well. Medear, dear love, I kiss my heart to thee; it aches for thee. Comquickly and shelter me within thine arms! My head that I hav held so proudly longs—ah! God knows how much it longs!—to lear once again on thy dear breast. For, through life, through deatl and on through immortality I am your love, your wife!

Your

ELBANOR GAVIN WARNER.



CHAPTER IX.

Tell me, gentle traveller, who hast wandered through the world and seen the sweetest roses blow, and the brightest gliding rivers, of all thine eyes have seen which is the fairest land? Shall I tell thee, child, where Nature is most blest and fair? It is where those whom we love abide. The space may be small, but it is more ample than kingdoms; it may be a desert, but through it runs the river of Paradise, and there are the enchanted bowers.

THE ZEND-AVESTA.

BEFORE ten o'clock next morning Jack was seated in solitude at the lawyer's office penning, by that gentleman's advice, an account of his wonderful discoveries to the Marquis of Pierhampton and Mr. Tom Ronaldson.

Merridew, in his own private sanctum, was busy with a copy of Debrett's English Peerage. difficulty, as far as I can see the only one," he soliloquised, as he examined the statements under "Pierhampton," "will be the identification of the personage who married Miss Ronaldson with this Lord James Bagshot Warner, whose death is given here as having taken place in 1837. There is no manner of doubt that she recognised him as the 'Lord Jim' she had so secretly and romantically attached herself to in her girlhood. But the question is whether, not the Marquis, but the heir-apparent will make that a point of dispute. Fortunately the journal casts some light on the intervening years between the supposition of his death and his appearance in New York. This Don Guadeloupe Vallejo is actually living, I

believe; at any rate, there is a town named after him in California. Then Thomas O. Larkin was over here last month with his family. He will inform us whether he had an English friend calling himself 'James James' in the forties and if 'James James,' 'Lord Jim,' and J. B. Warner, Esq., are not one and the same, and the father of Master Jack here I'll—well, I never make rash promises, but if I'm wrong I solemnly declare I'll eat my new silk hat."

And the lawyer rose and put Debrett in its place. He felt like a schoolboy in his gladness.

"I'll go at once and ferret him out, he was to return last night, and when I've put one or two leading questions we shall know where we are. But Jack must give me a copy of the marriage certificate."

So he looked in upon the young man, and while the latter made the transcription, Merridew took up The New York Tribune, which hitherto he had had neither time nor inclination to examine. In turning to the stocks and shares column, his eye was caught by the heading in leaded type, "A Romance in English High Life." A glance at the printed matter below revealed the names "Marquis of Pierhampton," "Lord Jim," "Miss Ronaldson," and in a few minutes he was aware that young Jack's right to the title of the Honourable John Warner was not likely to be disputed in Hurstwick. The "romance" was almost a literal reproduction of the details published by command of the Marquis in the Hurstwick Advertiser the Saturday after the receipt of the d'Acunha letter, and Merridew found himself in the triumphant position of instrument in furnishing not only the lacking marriage certificate but the lost heir himself.

As Jack handed him the copy he had asked for, the

lawyer silently pointed to the newspaper article, and hurriedly leaving the room proceeded at once to the telegraph office, whence he cabled to Pierton Abbey—"Marriage certificate found. Further particulars follow.—Merridew, U.S. Treasury lawyer."

The next moment he was driving post-haste to the Hotel Cosmopolitaine, and to his delight found Mr. J. B. Warner and the Spanish padre there, and willing to receive him.

Jack, newspaper in hand, was rooted to his chair. The rapidity with which the dense mystery, which had surrounded him from his very birth, had dispersed itself, almost took away his breath and power of motion. But all at once the consciousness that this strange story must be lying read or unread in every house and hotel in New York roused him to instant action. Snatching up the letters he had written and sealed, he gave them to a clerk for immediate despatch, and, turning the key upon the room containing the precious journal and certificate, he boarded a street car and was soon scaling the steps of the Hotel London. If Davenant got wind of his position there was no telling what he might do.

An hour later Miss Barnard burst in upon Mr. and Mrs. Davenant as they were quietly discussing family matters.

"Was that young Jack I saw in the hall as I got into the elevator?" she asked, excitedly. "If so——"

But here Davenant interrupted, anxious to avoid anything like a scene. "Jack was here for close on an hour this morning, and only left because Mr. Merridew sent a special messenger for him. The lawyer wanted him at once; he thought he had found his father."

"Yes, sister, and even if that should prove a fall hope, we decided last night that nothing shall into fere with Jack's friendship for Jo.," continued Mar "and I may as well tell you at once they will mar when he comes of age."

"I'm very glad to hear it," was Martha's surprisi rejoinder, as she sank upon an ottoman and con menced to unfold the newspaper she carried; " fact, I hurried up here on purpose to advise you bo to do all in your power to keep up the intimacy !

tween the two."

"Really, Martha, I confess I cannot understayou," said Mary, chidingly; "last night you we

going to write to Mr. Ronaldson-"

"But I didn't!" interrupted the other, with energy surprising in a woman of sixty-one. "No, was sharper than that, I cabled—cabled, you unde stand? I knew Mr. Ronaldson would refund to money."

Martin and Mary looked unutterable things; appeared an impossible task for either of them

attempt to comprehend the speaker.

"And lucky I did so, though I must say I general do have luck with my ventures, be they guinea-fow or a cow in calf," continued Miss Barnard. "O you dreamers!" (and here her contempt flowed an overwhelming flood upon the devoted heads of h listeners) "when will you act like ordinary hums beings and read the papers? Here, take this, ar when you've read the story it tells be thankful yo have a relative whose head is stocked with brain instead of pegs for foolish fancies to dangle from!"

As the wondering pair took the proffered journs Martha observed with immense self-complacency:

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"You will notice that a large reward is offered for any news concerning Jack's whereabouts. Of course, I could claim it, but I have resolved to say nothing about it. I shall prefer to be the adviser of the young people who are so largely indebted to me."

But quite in another vein was the rejoicing of Padre Geronimo Encarnacion. Leaving the father and son, who till that moment had never seen each other, he shut himself in the chamber Jim had provided for him at the Cosmopolitaine. With hands clasped behind his back, and head erect, he paced the floor. "At last! at last!" he cried. "Ah, Jacobo, at last! For thee these words were written; for thee are these promises."

And with the joy of him who joyeth only in the joy of another, he repeated in Spanish those poetic words from Isaiah: "In overflowing wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. Behold, I will set thy stones in fair colours and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy pinnacles of rubies and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy border of precious stones. And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children."

THE END.

. LONDON:

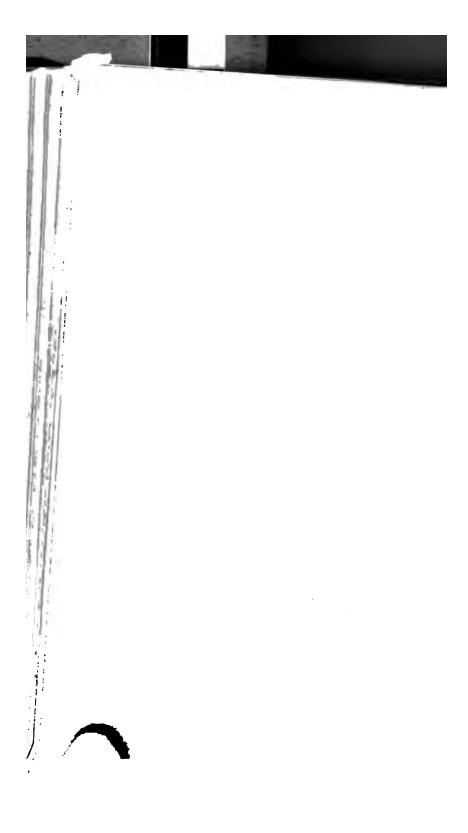
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